

Firewood Forum

Forest Service Firewood Forum draws attendees from 14 states and Canada to craft “Don’t Move Firewood” public outreach strategies.

The Challenge

In recent years, Northeastern Area states have come under increasing attack from invasive/exotic insects. It is now evident that human intervention, particularly through the movement of firewood, plays a major role in the spread of these dangerous tree killers. Emerald ash borer (EAB), for example, was originally found in southern Michigan but has now spread to much of that state, as well as Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, primarily through the movement of firewood for recreational and home heating purposes. It is estimated that at least 20 million trees have already died from EAB.

The affected states have quarantines which prohibit the movement of firewood outside of infested counties, but enforcement is not fully effective. Also, for the most part, the transportation of firewood is not regulated in the states bordering the infested states. Conversations with our state cooperators made it clear that public awareness at a level that would change behavior was a key component in addressing this problem.

The Solution:

In late May of 2006, prior to the Memorial Day weekend that marks the beginning of the summer camping season, a Firewood Forum was hosted at the Morton Arboretum outside of Chicago, Illinois. The Forum was designed to provide an opportunity for public affairs, natural resource/parks and recreation professionals to network and share information on this important issue. The goal was to craft cohesive strategies and messages that would be effective in changing the public’s behavior in the movement of firewood.

The Forest Health Protection unit of the USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Area, was the major sponsor of this event, in cooperation with APHIS, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Morton Arboretum. The conference organizers did a pre-Memorial Day media blitz to major media outlets throughout the Midwest asking campers to ‘leave their firewood at home’.

Benefits:

Over 70 attendees, representing 14 states and Canada, learned more about current communications and regulatory tools. In addition, participants developed strategies for coordinating efforts and sharing information beyond the infested states.

The Firewood Forum resulted in greater public awareness about emerald ash borer and the importance of educating the public to buy firewood locally and not transport it over distances.



In May of this year, NA FHP sponsored a Firewood Forum at Morton Arboretum, just outside of Chicago, IL. More than 80 people from 14 states attended, in an effort to craft a unified public awareness campaign about the dangers of spreading invasive insects through the movement of firewood. Above, some attendees participate in a breakout session.

Within a week of the Firewood Forum, a homeowner in Illinois reported what turned out to be a positive discovery of EAB in that state. Her decision to contact APHIS was prompted in part by the increased publicity generated by the Firewood Forum and other EAB activities. The combined media interest from this new detection and the Firewood Forum resulted in greater public awareness about emerald ash borer and the importance of educating the public to buy firewood locally and not transport it over distances.

As a result, Illinois has new regulations preventing the movement of firewood. Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota are in various stages of planning and executing public outreach on this subject. The US Forest Service Region 9 is developing a firewood policy for their National Forests and the Forest Supervisor on the Chequamegon/Nicolet has prohibited the movement of firewood into that forest. The National Park Service contacted visitors

Sharing Successes:

Presentations offered at the Firewood Forum have been posted to the World Wide Web. Several of the presentations were given at the Midwest Exotic Pest Workshop later in the year. Publications developed by the USDA APHIS and Forest Service were distributed to an even broader audience.

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