



Northeastern Area News Notes



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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Transporting Firewood—A Threat to Our Forests

It's the "all-American" experience—in summer we load up the family and head out to enjoy the great outdoors, complete with marshmallows toasting over the crackling campfire. How could this innocent activity endanger our forest resource? When we move the sticks of wood for our campfire, we also potentially move several serious forest insects and pathogens. Many of these insects and diseases weaken and kill trees. In some cases, such as emerald ash borer and butternut canker, they threaten to wipe out an entire genus and species of tree.

Let's take a look at who some of these sinister hitchhikers are, what can be done about them, and what larger efforts are being taken across the Northeast and Midwest to spread the word.

- Emerald ash borer—This exotic beetle is wreaking havoc across Michigan and has been discovered at locations in Indiana, Ohio, and Canada. Over 15 million ash trees have died in the United States alone. Many of the new discoveries have been associated with the movement of wood from infested areas. A single stick of firewood can carry enough beetles to establish a new infestation.
- Gypsy moth—This notorious hitchhiker has been moving around the United States for over 50 years on items transported by people. In late summer, the female moth lays its egg masses in hidden places and on surfaces. A nice pile of old firewood is an ideal spot for a gypsy moth to lay an egg mass. The eggs hatch in spring, and the tiny caterpillars disperse to find nice green hardwood leaves to chew.
- Dutch elm disease—This disease has been around for a while, but this villain doesn't act alone. It relies on a get-away vector—elm bark beetles—to transport it to new trees. The bark beetles live under the bark of dying and dead elms. They pick up the spores of the fungus from their galleries and move them to new trees. The bark beetles can have multiple generations per year, so infested beetles can emerge from elm wood throughout the summer camping season.
- Oak wilt disease—Oak wilt also relies on insects to transport it to new locations, but its mode of movement is a bit more specific than Dutch elm disease. The oak wilt pathogen, *Ceratocystis fagacearum*, kills oak trees and then produces spore-bearing mats of fungus under the bark of recently killed trees. These mats of fungal tissue smell fruity and attract sap-feeding beetles, which pick up spores of the fungus from the mats and then go visit fresh wounds on oak. Oak wilt mats can form on firewood that has been cut from diseased oaks.



- Sirex woodwasp—*Sirex noctilio* is a new player in our woods. The females lay eggs in pine trees, especially stressed ones, and the larvae bore deep into the wood. The larvae can tunnel around in the wood for over a year, giving ample opportunity for the infested wood to be cut for firewood or made into pallets, which can then be shipped all over the world. Sirex and its associated fungus kill trees. Sirex woodwasp was first discovered in North America in 2005 and has been found in parts of New York State and across the border in Canada. The actual extent of distribution in North America is still unknown.

The list also includes beech bark disease, pine wilt disease, hemlock woolly adelgid, butternut canker, and Asian longhorned beetle. In addition to these known insects and pathogens of concern, there are any number of other unknown villains out there that can be moved in firewood or other wood products.

A common practice among car and RV campers, cabin owners, hunters, and other outdoor recreationists is to pack their firewood from home for use while camping or staying at their cabins. One easy thing that we can all do this summer is to leave our firewood at home and purchase or obtain it from sources close to our camping or recreation destination. We can also inform others of the forest health impacts of transporting wood from one location to another.

Since the introduction of emerald ash borer, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio have developed “Stop Moving Firewood” strategies in their respective States. These outreach strategies are enhanced by Federal and State regulations banning the transportation of ash firewood because of emerald ash borer. Wisconsin, Missouri, Minnesota, and Illinois are all gearing up for independent firewood strategies; for the most part, the transportation of firewood is not regulated in these States. Wisconsin recently passed a law regulating the transportation of out-of-state firewood into State parks and forests (http://dnr.wi.gov/invasives/firewood/firewood_greensheet.pdf). The Northeastern Area has developed a “Don’t Move Firewood” poster appropriate for posting at campgrounds and other recreational sites to inform recreationists about the dangers of moving firewood.

On May 24, the Northeastern Area hosted a “Firewood Forum” at the Morton Arboretum outside Chicago. The forum provided an opportunity for States to coordinate efforts, strategize together, develop consistent messages, and share resources and networks to raise public awareness about transporting firewood as well as improve public understanding of their role in the prevention and detection of invasives. We anticipate that the energy and ideas shared at this forum will help minimize the unknowing spread of these forest-threatening insects and diseases.

To borrow a slogan from APHIS, one of our important partners in the fight against invasive forest pests, “*This summer, pack your clothes, pack your flip flops, and pack your gear . . . but leave your firewood at home.*” Please do your part, and encourage your family, friends, and neighbors to do theirs, and leave your firewood at home this summer!

— Kathryn Maloney

