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LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR MURRAY DESIGNATES AUGUST AS ASIAN LONGHORNED BEETLE AWARENESS MONTH

Local, state and federal officials highlight outreach and eradication efforts in Massachusetts



Lieutenant Governor Murray visits Green Hill Park in Worcester to highlight replanting efforts as part of Asian Longhorned Beetle Awareness Month.(Photo Credit: Norm Birenbaum/Lt. Gov.'s Office)

WORCESTER - Wednesday, August 10, 2011 - Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray today designated August as Asian Longhorned Beetle (ALB) Awareness Month, presenting a proclamation signed by Governor Deval Patrick, that reminds all residents of the Commonwealth to remain vigilant in spotting ALB and reporting possible sightings. The Lieutenant Governor was joined at today's replanting ceremony by officials from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR), the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to highlight tree replanting and prevention efforts at Green Hill Park in Worcester.

"I have seen first-hand the impact of the Asian Longhorned Beetle Infestation in my hometown of Worcester, and I understand the need to protect all Massachusetts communities from the spread of this invasive insect," said Lieutenant Governor Murray. "Our Administration continues to collaborate with our local and federal partners to raise awareness, spread the word and work together to help replant trees in impacted communities."

Infestation of the beetle was first reported in Worcester on August 1, 2008, leading to the removal of more than 27,000 trees across the city. In July 2010, a second infestation was discovered in Boston, but has so far remained limited in its scope.

"Our battle against the Asian Longhorned Beetle has been a great example of a true partnership between federal, state and local governments - and private organizations," said Congressman James McGovern. "We've made great progress in eradication, and will continue to work to raise public awareness to halt the spread of this invasive pest and to restore our urban forest."

Residents should be especially vigilant for the ALB during the summer months, when adult beetles have emerged from the trees and are active. The beetle can destroy hardwood trees including maple, birch and willow. By tunneling deep into a tree's branches and trunk, beetle larvae disrupt sap flow, weakening and eventually killing the tree. Once the beetle invades a tree, the only remedy is to cut the tree down and chip it into small pieces. ALB is thought to have been first introduced to the United States in New York in 1996 via wood packing material shipped from Asia.

"Among our greatest assets in the fight against ALB are everyday citizens," said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Richard K. Sullivan Jr. "Being alert to the warning signs of infestation can save entire landscapes."

Since the discoveries of ALB in Worcester and Boston, the USDA has led an ongoing eradication effort, known as the Massachusetts Asian Longhorned Beetle Cooperative Eradication Program, in partnership with DAR, DCR, the cities of Worcester and Boston, and the towns of Auburn, Boylston, Holden, Shrewsbury, West Boylston and Brookline.

"As our efforts continue to eradicate the ALB from Worcester County, to date we're seeing a 90% reduction of the number of infested trees found this year as compare to those found three years ago," said USDA Program Manager Clint McFarland. "We continue to appreciate the cooperation of folks impacted by the eradication efforts, especially as the program continues its work to contain and eliminate the ALB infestation from Worcester County."

DAR has been performing outreach and education to the public throughout this time at agricultural fairs, public festivals and other events across the state. In 2011, DAR has turned its focus to youth audiences, bringing on a full-time educational coordinator in partnership with DCR and USDA. The coordinator has been working throughout the state, with an emphasis on Worcester County, visiting schools and camps and teaching kids about ALB through a variety of indoor and outdoor activities. This focus on youth will continue through fall with an effort to get information about ALB into schools through free programs and educational activities as well as a national ALB curriculum developed by the USDA.

"The successful eradication of ALB will depend on continued outreach efforts to ensure that every resident can identify this invasive pest and knows what steps need to be taken to help eliminate its threat to native tree species and the state's agricultural interests," said DAR Commissioner Scott J. Soares.

A key player in the Massachusetts Asian Longhorned Beetle Cooperative Eradication program, DCR continues to notify property owners of their rights and responsibilities, hold public information meetings and alert residents to the presence of infested trees on their property. DCR staff has also surveyed the regulated area, removed infested trees and planted new ones. To date, DCR has planted 8,733 new trees.

"DCR will continue its part to aid in the protection of landscapes across the Commonwealth," said DCR Commissioner Edward M. Lambert, Jr. "With education we can raise awareness of ALB and with our replanting efforts we can revitalize Worcester's tree population."

"We are grateful for the support of the Patrick-Murray Administration in leading the efforts to rebuild Worcester's urban forest in response to the damage caused by the Asian Longhorn Beetle," said Worcester Mayor Joe O'Brien.

How to spot an infestation:

Signs of an ALB infestation include round, smooth-edged, dime-sized holes left by adult beetles exiting a tree, sawdust-like material on the ground, around the trunk or on tree limbs, and oozing sap. If an exit hole can be easily reached, try fitting the eraser end of a pencil into the hole. If it goes in straight at least one inch deep, contact the Asian Longhorned Beetle hotline (866-702-9938) or visit www.mass.gov/agr/alb. These beetles leave exit holes spread out across a tree. A series of holes together in a line is typically caused by woodpeckers or sapsuckers rather than ALB.

Throughout the summer, adult beetles emerge and feed on leaves and twigs, primarily on maple trees. Adult beetles are .75- to 1.5-inches long, shiny black with irregular white spots and have antennae that are one to two times their body length. The beetles can be found on trees, but also on park benches, car hoods, porches and sidewalks. The beetles are most active from early summer through mid-fall and do not attack oaks or conifers, such as pine or spruce. Female beetles chew small oval pits, a half-inch in diameter, to lay their eggs beneath tree bark. After the eggs hatch, the larvae bore into and feed off of living trees over the winter.

To report suspicious tree damage, view photographs and videos of tree damage or read about ALB, visit www.massnrc.org/pests/alb or call the toll-free Asian Longhorned beetle hotline at (866) 702-9938.

More information about the eradication program: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/newsroom/hot_issues/alb/alb.shtml

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