

State On Alert For Imported Insect

Quarantined Pest Kills Ash Trees

By **BILL LEUKHARDT**
wleukhardt@courant.com

As people worked to clean up wood debris last week in New Haven County after Sandy, state officials were watching.

They were checking to see that the cleanup of thousands of broken trees and branches didn't violate federal and state quarantines imposed to stop the spread of the emerald ash borer.

The imported pest was discovered in New Haven County in July.

The quarantine was imposed in August to slow the spread of the ash-tree killing insect, found previously in Bethany, Beacon Falls, Naugatuck, Prospect and more recently in Waterbury.

The tiny bug burrows into ash tree bark, so it's difficult to see if firewood, wood products — or storm debris — harbor it.

As a result of the ban, no firewood or other forest products from New Haven County can be moved from that part of the state without a permit. Violators face a \$100 fine.

"We got the word about the quarantine, so any wood cleared in New Haven County after Storm Sandy either stayed in the county or else was disposed of at a regulated facility," state Forestry Director Christopher Martin said Friday.

Since the quarantine was first imposed Aug. 9, state and federal forest and insect experts have been contacting foresters, wood lot owners

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and other who deal with native wood products to let them know about the ban. The bright green insect is native to Asia, is about the size of a grain of rice, and kills ash trees by destroying the inner layers that carry sap to limbs and leaves.

Martin said the quarantine is meant to slow the spread of the borer. The insect has destroyed millions of ash trees in 15 states since it was first detected in Michigan a decade ago. Connecticut is the first New England state to discover the insect, which was found in New York several years ago.

According to Martin, quarantine enforcement requires that trees harvested post-Sandy be considered suspect. There's a \$100 fine for a quarantine violation.

So far, no fines have been issued. State entomologist Kirby Stafford said officials are "focusing on education,

outreach, and cooperation rather than fines."

Stafford said some wood product workers in the quarantine area have gotten permits that will allow them legally to move products. "The important thing is educating people about the quarantine and risks to our ash resources," said Stafford, who leads the entomology department at the Connecticut Agriculture Experiment Station headquarters in New Haven.

Some ash trees in the state are declining from a different foe, a microbial disease caused ash yellows, which has symptoms similar to an infestation of ash borers, he said.

"Unlike some other parts in the country, ash yellows contributed to the difficulty in detecting emerald ash borers, as a declining ash tree is not necessarily an indicator for the presence of this beetle," Stafford said.

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West Hartford is considering only allowing hens, which don't need a rooster to

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