



Invasive Plant Pest and Disease Awareness Month Help Keep Pests from Bugging Wisconsin

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MADISON – You've heard it before, and we hate to be pests, but now that cabin and camping season is starting, remember: Don't move firewood.

"This is probably the single most important thing you can do – or not do – to prevent spreading insects and diseases that could severely damage our forests," says Brian Kuhn, director of the Plant Industry Bureau in the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

April is Invasive Plant Pest and Disease Awareness Month. Most Wisconsin residents are probably aware of pests like the gypsy moth and emerald ash borer. Kuhn's bureau conducts an annual aerial spray program to control gypsy moth populations, and 50 of the state's 72 counties are under a quarantine for the pest. Emerald ash borer, a much newer invader, has now been found in 41 Wisconsin counties.

But there are other pests that DATCP is trying to keep out of the state entirely. Anyone who has visited the western United States in recent years has seen whole mountainsides of dead pine trees, killed by the mountain pine beetle. Another beetle, the walnut twig beetle, carries a fungus that causes thousand cankers disease and destroys black walnut trees. The Asian longhorned beetle has been found just outside Chicago, and eradicated at great expense. It feeds on maple trees. Any of these pests could inflict great damage on our forests, and the most likely way they would enter the state would be as hitchhikers on firewood or other wood products.

You might remember that DATCP recently asked people to be on the lookout for wood-boring beetles in rustic log furniture, after finding infestations by two different species in shipments last year. Luckily, the department was able to work with partners in the Minnesota Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Agriculture's Plant Pest and Quarantine Section to stop those infestations in their tracks. These insects, which came in on the furniture from Asia, could have killed thousands or millions of trees if they had escaped into the environment.

"Our forests are among our most valuable resources in Wisconsin. We have one of the nation's most productive timber industries," Kuhn said. Forestry provides 64,000 jobs in Wisconsin, with a \$3.4 billion annual payroll. That's in addition to the value of forests to tourism. Urban forests are important, too, in reducing cooling and heating costs and keeping soil in place.

"We rely on the public to be our eyes and ears, and to do the right thing by buying firewood where they burn it," Kuhn says. "We work one-on-one with affected businesses in quarantine areas so they can continue to move their products while minimizing the risk of also moving pests. And we work very closely with our partners at the USDA, the Department of Natural Resources, the University and the Extension. It's a whole community looking out for our resources."

For more information about plant pests, visit datcp.wi.gov and search for "pests" or visit hungrypests.com.

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