

Look Up!

What a disappointing winter it has been in this part of the Northeast. There has been little snow, not enough rain and the temperatures have been quite warm. That all means the mosquitoes and ticks are out earlier than usual. We will be ready to tackle whatever happens in Lehigh County. As we prepare for another season in the field, we must be mindful of a new hazard - falling ash trees. Ash trees were popular specimens for street and park plantings. They are beautiful trees. But as they decline, due to the emerald ash borer, they are killing people.

Emerald Ash Borer (*Agrilus planipennis*) is a small green invasive wood boring beetle. It is native to East Asia and was first found in Michigan in 2002 after arriving in shipping crates. Now, in 2023, EAB has devastated the forests, streets and parks leaving millions of dead and dying trees in its wake throughout the Northeast and Midwest.

Adults feed on the leaves. EAB grubs kills ash trees by tunneling under the bark and compromising the living, sapwood tissue layer. This, in addition to the holes left by the exiting adults, contributes to drying of the structural wood of the trees causing them to become brittle and prone to cracking. Internal damage can be hidden. Infested trees that are still leafy and green on some branches belie the damage under the bark. Limbs can fall in a slight breeze, during a rain storm or on a sunny calm day. Once the trees are dead, fungi move in to finish the job, further weakening the branches. For safety reasons, arborists advise removing the trees before they are totally dead.

Vector surveillance activities frequently place us in the path of these “widow makers”. But everyone should be aware of the danger, even in urban and backyard areas. Take the time to look up and assess the condition of the trees. Get to know the signs of dead and dying ash trees. Look for thinning in the canopy. There may be a lot of sprouting around the roots and trunk. Look for woodpecker damage or fungal growth.

Think about alternate routes when driving in stormy weather if you are aware of a row of dead ashes along the road. Take stock of your favorite hiking trails and proceed with caution. Don't park under an ash tree.

There are websites devoted to 'death by ash tree'. Try to avoid inclusion in that hall of fame.





Dying ash tree



Thinning in the canopy



Dead giveaway



EAB borer damage



Stand of dead ash