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Plant Protection Today: Asian Longhorned Beetle Program Implements Dynamic New Survey Approach



Tree climbers survey trees that Asian longhorned beetles (ALBs) could attack. They search for adult beetles or signs of infestation like egg pits that female beetles chew into the bark, round exit holes where an adult ALB emerged, and sawdust-like material called frass.

Scientific Innovation Supports Practical Pest Eradication

By April Dawson

The Asian Longhorned Beetle (ALB) Eradication Program recently rolled out a new, advanced approach to surveying for the beetle. The invasive insect attacks and kills 12 types of trees. Its favorite is maple, but it also attacks ash, birch, buckeye, elm, golden raintree, katsura, London planetree, mimosa, mountain ash, poplar, and willow trees. APHIS' Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) program and its partners are battling ALB infestations in New York, Massachusetts, Ohio, and South Carolina.

PPQ collaborates with Federal and State partners to detect and eradicate ALB infestations. The program conducts surveys to determine the scope of the infestation; establish the quarantine area; determine if ALB has spread outside of the established quarantine area and, if it has, expand the quarantine area; and determine when to release an area from quarantine. PPQ also develops new science-based ways to eradicate the beetle. This includes the new dynamic approach to survey trees. It is reducing repeat inspections of trees at a low risk of becoming infested.

Historically, after delimiting the infestation and defining the quarantine boundaries, the survey boundaries remained fixed until complete eradication. “Over the last year, PPQ’s Science and Technology unit provided guidance and scientific leadership to analyze historical ALB program data, which led to revising the survey protocols,” said Kathryn Bronsky, APHIS ALB National Policy Manager. “From our analysis, we’ve determined that we can adjust survey boundaries based on negative surveys. This change is supported by survey history, infestation levels, time-lapse, and risk.”

Over time, this new approach will reduce the number of tree inspections and more efficiently use program resources. The program identified over 13,000 acres that no longer need to be resurveyed. This means some areas could be removed from quarantine in the next few years.



ALB surveyors can inspect trees from the ground using binoculars.

These quarantine reductions will move the ALB program closer to its eradication goals.

In 2024, the ALB program started using this new dynamic approach to surveying trees in lower risk areas of the ALB quarantines. “The changes improve program efficiency and will reduce the time spent re-inspecting trees that are not infested and are at a low risk of becoming infested,” Bronsky said.

“This new approach came from the creative ALB program staff, said Josie Ryan, APHIS ALB National Operations Manager. “They are always looking for innovative and effective ways to meet eradication goals.”

The program removes infested trees at no cost to property owners and continues to respond to calls for assistance and provide outreach.

“We need people looking for and reporting tree damage,” said Ryan. “We ask that people look at their trees and report any suspicious damage. You can help us find the beetle so we can eliminate it.”

People who live in an ALB-quarantined area can help by doing the following:

- Check your trees for the beetle and the damage it causes and report any suspicions.
- Allow program officials property access to inspect trees and remove any infested trees.
- Before hiring tree companies, confirm they have an ALB compliance agreement.
- Contact the program or municipality to learn how to dispose of or move yard waste.
- Contact the program if you have any tree materials that might have ALB.
- Buy or gather firewood where you will burn it, or use certified heat-treated firewood.

For more updates, subscribe to the ALB newsletter today! Anyone can sign up by visiting Asian Longhorned Beetle (scroll to the bottom of the page to the “Stay up to date” section). Or, you can use this direct link.

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