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NEWS

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Insects Hitch Ride on Firewood and Infest Urban Trees

FORT COLLINS, Colo. — Traveling to the high country to gather firewood is an annual ritual for many Coloradans every fall. But transporting firewood from the high country may come at a price this year.

Local forestry experts are seeing evidence that mountain pine beetles are hitching a ride on firewood and infesting Scotch pines in some Front Range communities including Fort Collins, Loveland, Windsor and Greeley.

The best way to avoid the inadvertent transport of mountain pine beetles is to look for wood that is completely dry and ready to burn. “Before transporting firewood, make sure the sap is completely dried and the bark peels off easily,” said Boyd Lebeda, Fort Collins district forester, Colorado State Forest Service. “The best option is to use firewood on which the bark has been removed,” adds Lebeda.

If the bark is difficult to peel back and tunnels with adult beetles or larvae are present under the bark, experts advise against transporting it for use as firewood, as it may still be hosting beetle larvae. The soft inner bark, or cambium layer, is where the beetles and their larvae live. The larvae can live in the cambium for months after a tree is cut because of the long drying time for wood.

Another tell-tale sign of mountain pine beetle infestation is the presence of bluestain fungi, which disables the tree’s defenses and interrupts the flow of water. The combination of fungi and beetle feeding rapidly kills the tree. Once dried, the blue-stained wood no longer poses a threat, as the wood no longer hosts beetle larvae.

Ten to 12 months after a beetle attacks a tree, infested tree foliage turns yellow to red. When the damage has been done, the beetles are ready to exit and search for a new home.

Another concern this fall is the emerald ash borer. This non-native insect pest bores into the cambium layer of ash trees, where they can live from 1-3 years before they emerge.

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Although Colorado currently is not experiencing emerald ash borer infestations, forestry officials are concerned that hunters from the Great Lakes, where major outbreaks have occurred, may transport them on firewood they bring into the state during hunting season.

Emerald ash borers can pose a serious threat to community forests, so Lebeda is urging the public to help spread the word to visiting friends and family to encourage them to use only local firewood when in Colorado.

“With the recent mountain pine beetle epidemic and the threat posed by insects such as the emerald ash borer, it is imperative that residents and visitors take the necessary steps to help keep our urban forests vibrant and healthy,” Lebeda said. “One way to help is to inspect firewood for evidence of insect infestations or to purchase firewood from a reliable commercial vendor.”

For additional information on tree insects and diseases or for help diagnosing insect infestations, contact your local city forestry department or Colorado State Forest Service district office.

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