

USDA APHIS SUPPORTS CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS TOWNS IMPACTED BY SNOW AND ICE STORMS

December 24, 2008 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS) provided critical assistance to central Massachusetts towns impacted by snow and ice storms over the past two weeks in order to reduce the spread of tree limbs, branches and other woody material infested by the Asian longhorned beetle.

USDA APHIS, working closely with the state of Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), took the following steps to facilitate removal of storm-generated woody debris, to clear roadways made impassible by downed limbs and to assist homeowners in recovery efforts. Also key to recovery efforts was ensuring tree care and removal companies had the training necessary to successfully work in the then 63-square mile, central Massachusetts region under regulation due to the presence of the invasive Asian longhorned beetle. (The regulated area was expanded to 64-square miles on December 23, 2008.)

- The State of Massachusetts, through the DCR and USDA APHIS took over operation of the Ararat Street Wood Disposal Facility in Worcester from the City of Worcester on December 12th. Under APHIS and State management, the facility's hours of operation were expanded to process wood generated by the weather emergencies. It stayed open 12 hours a day for a week in order to handle storm-generated debris. The Ararat Street Wood Disposal Facility is also now accepting all wood debris from towns surrounding Worcester that fall within the ALB regulated area.
- On Saturday, December 13th, the Asian Longhorned Beetle Cooperative Eradication Program had 12 federal staff members of APHIS and the US Forest Service assessing storm damage to trees throughout the 63-square mile area under regulation to address the Asian longhorned beetle infestation. This work continued on Sunday, December 14th.
- USDA APHIS increased the availability of compliance training sessions for tree and lawn care companies seeking to do business in the ALB regulated area. With ice and snow storms bringing companies into the central Massachusetts area to seek work, additional training sessions were quickly arranged to accommodate them. In the days immediately after the ice storms, training sessions were held two times a day for several days, and over 180 companies were brought under compliance and therefore ready to work in the area.

- USDA APHIS worked with the town of Shrewsbury to add a second wood disposal area in Shrewsbury. The new site, near I-70 and Clinton Avenue in Shrewsbury, was opened December 18th and accepts wood from throughout the regulated area.
- USDA APHIS employees have been a presence in the communities under regulation as they go door to door talking to homeowners about wood removal efforts, seeking signed permission to enter private property and answering questions about the beetle, the infestation and the program in general. This work started in the hard hit areas of Worcester, Holden and West Boylston on Saturday, December 13th and continues.
- In the days following the ice storms and before the snow storms that hit on December 19th and 21st, USDA APHIS and state of Massachusetts fielded several crews of tree removal contractors throughout the hardest hit towns of West Boylston, Holden and Worcester. There were 12 log loading vehicles with crews and five bucket trucks and crews removing woody debris from the streets and sidewalks and removing woody debris from private properties in those towns
- The ALB Eradication Program began assisting the Town of Shrewsbury and the Town of Boylston with storm debris clean up the week of December 22nd. These two towns also fall within the Massachusetts ALB regulated area.
- Additional federal resources came into the storm damaged area to assist with debris cleanup the week starting December 22nd. Fifteen USDA APHIS employees traveled to Massachusetts to supplement those already working in the area. These APHIS employees are assisting with debris clean up, meeting with community residents to answer questions and collecting property access permission forms, staffing the Ararat Street and Shrewsbury wood disposal sites, assisting with regulatory compliance activities and facilitating recovery in the Massachusetts ALB regulated area as needed.

The ALB is an invasive pest that arrived in the United States from Asia concealed in solid wood packing material—the pallets and crates used to transport goods from overseas. The ALB infests and kills many species of hardwoods, making it a serious threat to forest and urban trees alike. The insect attacks a variety of tree species including: the following genera: maple, elm, willow, birch, horsechestnut, London planetree, poplar, ash, mimosa (silk tree), hackberry, and mountain ash.

An ALB eradication program was initiated in Central Massachusetts in August 2008 upon the insect's detection by a Worcester resident. Working in partnership to eradicate the Asian longhorned beetle with APHIS are the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Massachusetts Department of Agriculture, the City of Worcester and the US Forest Service.