



Emerald ash borer digs into wallets

Oakville Beaver

The emerald ash borer (EAB) infestation has already cost the Town of Oakville a lot and is now hitting individual residents in the pocketbook.

Jamesway Boulevard resident Lucy James said Town employees recently came to her door to discuss a dead ash tree on her property. Many of her neighbours had a similar experience, she said.

"Anybody right now who has a dead ash tree on their property is getting a knock at the door by the Town telling them they have to cut the tree down within 30 days," said James. "I was told that if I don't cut it down the cost would be added to my tax bill."

The Town's Manager of Forestry Services John McNeil said as the EAB populations grows, it is taking a toll on untreated private ash trees.

When the trees die and are not taken down by the property owner, he said, the Town will step in, but only when they receive a complaint from a neighbour or when Town employees notice the dead tree and believe it is a danger to the public.

"We're not targeting private ash tree owners by any means, but we have staff out all the time driving the roads... We know from the mapping work we did where the EAB hot spots are in town and we try to be vigilant when we are up in those neighbourhoods," said McNeil.

"I remember driving one day and seeing this private ash tree overhanging a sidewalk and the sidewalk was littered with dead wood."

McNeil said the tree had become a public safety hazard and had to be cut down before falling branches injured or killed someone.

By notifying the property owner and giving them a deadline to remove the tree, McNeil said, the Town is doing the homeowner a favour because the property owner would be liable for any injuries caused by a dead tree.

He said if the tree is an immediate threat to public safety, the Town will remove it and bill the resident for the work.

McNeil also confirmed if a resident doesn't meet a deadline to remove a tree, the Town would also take it down and send the bill.

James said the Town should be offering assistance. She said two tree removal companies estimated it would cost approximately \$1,000 to take down her tree.

While James could afford it, she said not everyone can.

"We have lots of elderly people in the neighbourhood, we have people who are unemployed," she said. "There is one property where the fellow has eight ash trees that are all dead and he has to cut them down within 30 days. Where is he supposed to get \$8,000?"

With 44,000 ash trees on private property in Oakville and EAB running rampant, James believes the Town should have made arrangements with a tree removal company, which residents could contact to have their diseased ash trees cut down at a discounted price.

McNeil said the Town wants to encourage residents to have their trees treated with the bio-insecticide TreeAzin.

He said more than 5,000 municipal ash trees have been treated with the insecticide since 2008 and 98 per cent are in good condition.

James said the ash tree she lost was treated with TreeAzin at a cost of approximately \$400.

She said she has no plan to treat two more ash trees on her property.

"We empathize if someone is in a situation where they haven't budgeted for a rainy day. I wonder what they would do if their roof was leaking," said McNeil.

"We sent letters out to people who own ash trees last year — so they could get prepared. If you don't treat the tree it is inevitable that it will die so you should start setting aside some funds to deal with that."



John Wilson of the Town of Oakville removes a dead ash tree on municipal property.