

Pine Bark Beetle Infestations At Peak This Time Of Year

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Pine bark beetle infestations are at their peak this time of year and pines — like other plants — have been under a great deal of weather stress.

There are three major types of bark beetles and one wood borer that have created problems for homeowners in the area.

The most dreaded of the beetles is the Southern Pine Beetle. It attacks pines of all sizes. Infestations usually start as the result of stress, often caused by lightning strikes and soil disturbances.

If the tree is strong enough, it may drown or pitch out the beetle. But if the beetle succeeds in entering the tree, it constructs an S-shaped tunnel under the bark around the tree and introduces a fungi or mold which clogs up the water conducting tubes in the tree. Young beetles emerge from

the tree through holes in the bark in about 30 days.

The beetles can be controlled by preventing disturbances, by destroying infested trees before young beetles emerge, by spraying lindane insecticide on the whole tree or by encouraging woodpeckers — which eat up to 65 percent of the hatching beetles.

The black turpentine beetle is often confused with the Southern Pine Beetle. It too attacks trees under stress.

The black turpentine beetle leaves popcorn-shaped pitch tubes. It attacks the lower 5 feet of the main stem first and seldom gets over 15 feet up.

The Southern Pine Beetle, meanwhile, often starts its attack at 15 feet and spreads up and down the tree.

Trees can often pitch out the turpentine beetle, which is longer than the Southern Pine Bee-

tle. The turpentine beetle also causes less damage under the bark and does not introduce mold and fungus.

The best method of controlling the turpentine beetle is by preventing disturbances and spraying the lower 15 feet of the main stem with lindane. If a fine dust appears at the base of the tree, the tree should be cut down and destroyed.

The ips Engraver Beetles also attack weakened trees. It is also similar in size to the Southern Pine Beetle but has a shovel-shaped hind end.

The engraver beetle also carries the same fungi that the Southern Pine Beetle carries, but its lesser potential for population explosions and its ability to attack only very weak trees make it less of a threat.

The engraver beetle girdles trees with Y- or H-shaped tun-

nels just under the bark and tiny, flat pitch tubes may or may not be present.

The best method of control is to cut down and destroy infested trees since they are usually too far gone to save.

The Southern Pine Sawyer attacks are marked by excelsior-like grass or sawdust around the base of its host. It attacks trees that are dead or almost dead and can often even be heard chewing. Sometimes it is found in split pine firewood.

The adult is mottled, grayish brown and much longer than the beetles above. Its antennae are almost twice as long as its body, giving it the name long-horned beetle.

There is no need to try to control long-horned beetles unless trees are to be used for lumber. Spraying peeling bark will prevent infestation, but if the wood

is to be burned for firewood, pesticides should not be used. Fumes given off by insecticide-treated wood may be toxic.

For more information or help with identification, contact the county extension office or Jim Kea at 792-1621.

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