



Questions and Answers: Changes in the Approach toward Fighting the Emerald Ash Borer

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) recently published a final rule that removes the federal domestic emerald ash borer (EAB) quarantine regulations. The final rule is effective January 14, 2021.

EAB is a beetle native to northeastern Asia that feeds on ash trees. Since it was first detected in Michigan in 2002, EAB has spread to 35 States and the District of Columbia. The quarantine has been unsuccessful at stopping the spread of this invasive pest. By removing the domestic quarantine regulations, APHIS can redirect available resources toward rearing and releasing tiny wasps to serve as biological control agents. A biological control agent is an organism, such as an insect, that is a natural enemy of EAB and can be used to help manage infestations. The larvae of four parasitoid wasp species are known to kill EAB. The goal of the EAB program is to help maintain ash trees as part of the North American landscape.

What is changing?

The EAB program is transitioning from a program that includes regulatory activities, such as issuing permits, certificates and compliance agreements, to a program that is focused on methods for management of the pest, such as rearing and releasing biological control agents.

What does this mean to me?

Because there is no longer an EAB federal quarantine in the United States, APHIS no longer regulates EAB or the movement of ash wood, ash wood products, and hardwood firewood. However, there may be other federal or state quarantines that regulate the movement of wood, wood products and other articles. Please contact your state department of agriculture to ask about any quarantines in your area.



SHUTTERSTOCK PHOTO OF ASH TREES

What other activities have changed or will change?

Since there is no EAB federal quarantine, APHIS will no longer investigate quarantine violations, issue compliance agreements, issue permits for interstate movement of previously regulated materials, or issue kiln certifications. As of January 14, 2021, all previously issued EAB kiln certifications are no longer required by APHIS. Please contact your State Plant Regulatory Official to learn if kiln certifications are still required in your state, by visiting <https://nationalplantboard.org/membership/>.

How is biological control used to manage EAB?

For several years, APHIS has researched EAB's natural enemies—tiny stingless wasps known as parasitoids—for use as biological control agents. A female parasitoid wasp finds a host EAB and lays her egg in the host. The wasp egg hatches, and the developing wasp larva will feed on the host insect, eventually killing it. These parasitoids are showing great promise in several states, especially in terms of protecting young ash saplings from EAB. So far, APHIS and our partners have released more than 8 million parasitoids in 30 states and the District of Columbia and recovered their offspring in 22 states. This means the wasps are establishing, reproducing, and more importantly, attacking and killing EAB.



USDA PHOTO OF BIOCONTROL RELEASE CONTAINER

What is being done to help the states fight infestations?

APHIS is working with state departments of agriculture, Tribal partners, and others to detect EAB by using traps, debarking ash logs, and conducting visual tree inspection surveys. Finding EAB infestations helps to determine where biological control agents should be released. APHIS rears the biological control agents in our rearing facility located in Michigan and ships them to partners who then release the parasitoids in areas where EAB is infesting ash trees. We also work with our partners to determine if the wasps successfully reproduce and become established. If requested, APHIS can provide training and equipment to State regulatory officials who want to implement state-issued kiln certifications.

What additional research is underway to help manage EAB?

APHIS is researching the use of integrated pest management practices to reduce and control EAB in both urban and forest settings. These practices use a combination of tools and strategies to identify, manage, and reduce the risks and impacts from pests.

What about the risk that firewood poses as a pathway for spreading plant pests?

APHIS is working with the National Plant Board (NPB) to develop a web-based toolkit for the NPB Firewood Guidelines to assist states in determining how they can best prevent or reduce the movement of pests and pathogens on firewood. We continue to conduct outreach to the general public on the noncommercial movement of firewood. Our partnership with the Don't Move Firewood initiative encourages the public to buy or responsibly gather firewood where they burn it or use certified, heat-treated firewood. You can learn more by visiting www.dontmovefirewood.org.

How can I learn more?

To learn more about the EAB program, please visit www.aphis.usda.gov/plant-health/eab, or sign up to receive the EAB program report through our Stakeholder Registry, by visiting https://www.aphis.usda.gov/plant_health/downloads/eab-report-sign-up.pdf.

Issued December 2020

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.