



EAB Stories and Lessons Learned...

Learning and sharing how communities are responding to Emerald Ash Borer

Part III: Communication

“Take a field tour with community officials to show them where their money is going. It’s hard to get their attention until the tree in their front yard is dead.” Tom Wilson shares this comment from his experience in Westland, MI. When the community faced their initial large-scale death of ash in 2000, Wilson kept the city council constantly informed on the EAB infestation. He took officials on a tour to see first-hand the removal of dead ash trees. They experienced brittle debris flying everywhere, saw the huge mess left behind, and were finally able to comprehend just how labor intensive the clean-up of dead ash really was. His point: “It is cheaper to remove live ash than dead ones, and I need money now to remove live ash trees.” This strategy paid off. The city put off buying a fire truck for 5 years to fund the tree removal project.

For those communities dealing with dead trees, deciding which neighborhoods would have their ash removed first got very political. Officials always wanted their district first in line; so instead, Wilson used the “we-don’t-want-dead-children-in-the-schoolyard” tactic. One big lesson from him when dealing with officials is to AVOID making promises or setting dates!

In Toledo, OH, OSU-Extension played a strong role with public information/education. With the other two agencies (DNR and Department of Agriculture), they held many town hall open houses. These presentations began with explaining the five stages of EAB reaction (Indifference, Revelation, Alarm, Anger, & Acceptance) as a way to defuse public outrage. They found eradication had a way of raising awareness like nothing else. They also offered EAB 101 to 13 communities, and conducted one-on-one presentations for officials and local foresters. Their advice: “Get the proper lingo down – ‘EAB has not been detected in our town’; ‘We recommend that...’; ‘It is a wise use of taxpayer dollars if...’”

- People don’t accept the extent of the problem until the tree in their own yard is dead.
- Tree removal has the potential to get very political. Tree managers must effectively communicate safety concerns related to dead trees.
- Eradication has been the most successful way of raising public awareness in Ohio.

For a more detailed version of this story as well as other community’s stories, visit [Lesson’s Shared - Journal Entries 4, 7 & 9](#).

For resources to help communicate EAB issues to officials, media, staff and the public, visit the Emerald Ash Borer Toolkit at <http://dnr.wi.gov/forestry/uf/eab/> (Chapter 9 - Communication)

During EAB Awareness Week, Ohio University-Extension set up an EAB display at their major league baseball stadium. The display included baseball bats, one of the best known white ash products. Volunteers put signs on ash trees around the grounds and they handed out EAB cards to people with inquiries.

The Village of Clinton, WI (just four miles from the Illinois border) is raising public awareness through the use of magnetic bumper stickers. High school staff and students manned a downtown EAB information booth around Memorial Day weekend to hand out “Don’t Move Firewood” bumper stickers and to answer questions from the public.

Please share what your community is doing to prepare for EAB with others. Send ideas to Olivia Witthun, Urban Forestry Assistant olivia.witthun@wi.gov.

The third entry of EAB Stories and Lessons Learned was compiled by Northeast Region Urban Forestry Assistant Olivia Witthun and South Central Urban Forestry Assistant Kathy Gonzalez.