

# SVEC Takes on the ‘Green Menace’

by Preston Knight, SVEC Writer



For utilities like Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative (SVEC), there's no love lost between them and the emerald ash borer beetle.

"They're creepy looking," said Tom McCampbell, SVEC's vegetation management coordinator in the Winchester District.

The emerald ash borer is an exotic, metallic-green, one-half-inch long, "very hungry" beetle most likely brought into the U.S. on solid wood packing material carried in cargo ships or airplanes from its native Asia, according to the Fairfax County Department of Public Works and Environmental Services.

It was first discovered in the United States in Michigan in 2002, and in Virginia — specifically, Fairfax County — the following year. It was eradicated in Virginia, but reappeared in 2008, and by 2016 was found in 25 counties in the Commonwealth.

Millions of native ash trees across the country have died from infestation of the emerald ash borer, which places the beetle toward the top of the list of public enemies for electric companies. Infested or dead trees quickly become unstable and can fall without warning. This increases the risk of outages caused from branches and trees falling onto power lines.

Early feeding damage by the emerald ash borer is difficult to detect because trees show few symptoms, according to the Virginia Cooperative Extension Service. As the infestation progresses, the tree starts to thin out and branches in the top sections of the tree start to die. Eventually, woodpeckers will fleck off the bark as they feed on borer larvae, which makes the tree look blotchy. It usually takes two to five years for damage to be noticed and, by then, it is too late to save the tree.

It is important that infested wood remain near its original location to help slow the borers' spread. Therefore, in wooded areas, SVEC will fell trees back into the woods or trim them to eliminate the hazard to our lines. Branches from trimmed trees will be left in the woods along with the felled trees. In member-maintained areas, the wood will be left on site. To further minimize the movement of infested materials, all chips will be left as close as possible to the original tree location, but outside of the member-maintained area.

Removal of dead trees, however, is very costly for SVEC and all native ash trees, unless treated with insecticides, will be killed by the borer. That's why, like many

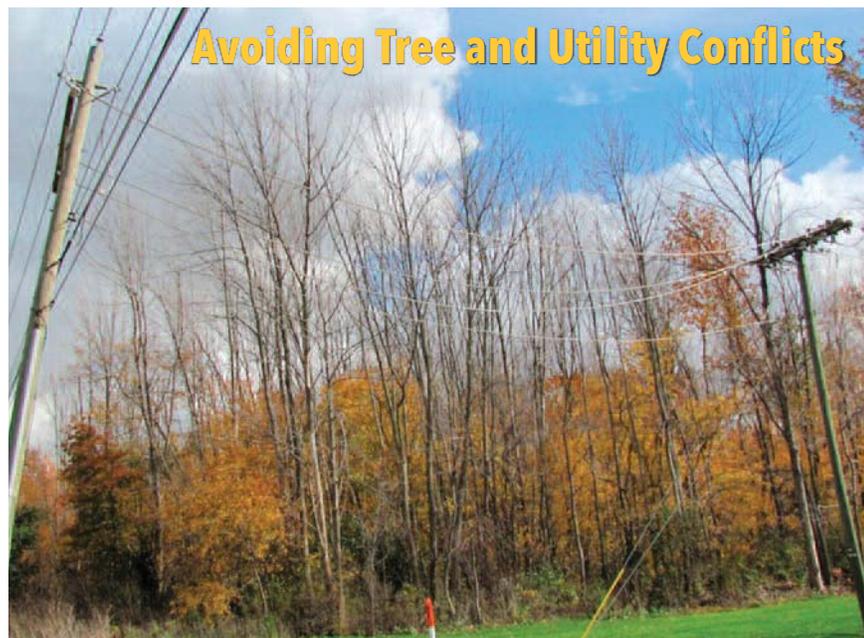
utilities, the Cooperative takes a proactive approach of removing or cutting back healthy ash trees as part of its regular vegetation-management program for rights-of-way. This process began in Frederick County in 2014, after infestation of the emerald ash borer was detected. It is estimated that 10 percent of the trees in Frederick County are ash.

Although the density of ash trees is less as you move south in the Valley, the emerald ash borer is now starting to make an impact on ash trees in Page and Shenandoah counties, and will soon be attacking trees in Rockingham and Augusta counties. This will require their removal on a proactive basis as well, McCampbell said.

The Cooperative, which typically completes vegetation-management activities on a rotation, went back and patrolled all of its three-phase lines in Frederick County that had been cleared and trimmed before the local detection of the beetle in 2014. As a result, several thousand ash trees that threatened our facilities were cut down.

Going forward, SVEC and our cutting contractor, Asplundh Tree Expert Company, will work together to ensure that removal or cutting back of ash trees is completed as we work through our rotation.

If, however, you have trees you believe pose a threat to the power lines, you can report them by calling SVEC at 1-800-234-7832. Our vegetation-management coordinators will investigate these reports and determine if the trees should be worked out of rotation.



Trees contacting power lines are a major cause of extended outages. Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative advises member-owners to be mindful of the size of a tree before planting it.

Planting tall-growing trees under and near overhead lines will ultimately require SVEC to cut them to maintain safe clearance from the wires. Also, children or adults climbing in these trees can be severely injured or even killed if they come in contact with lines.

Underground lines can be affected, too, which is why you should always call Miss Utility at 811 before you dig. Never assume that utility lines are buried deeper than you plan to dig. In some cases, utility lines are very close to the surface.

Your garden center staff or tree care professional will gladly help you select the right tree for your property. If you have questions or concerns about SVEC lines being contacted by trees on your property, please contact the Cooperative at 1-800-234-7832.