



Asian longhorn beetle

# ALIEN INVADERS

are hiding in your firewood

by Karin Verschoor

Spring has arrived; it's time to open the camp. Firewood left over from winter won't be used at home this summer, so it makes sense to toss it in the truck and take it up to camp. But because spring and summer turn out to be warm, that firewood doesn't get burned right away. It stays there, neatly stacked and covered until fall, when a warm fire is a necessity at the end of a long, chilly day outdoors.

The next summer, those beautiful trees that make the camp such a special place, a paradise found, are suddenly starting to turn brown and die.

That innocent-looking pile of firewood harbored insect larvae that emerged as adults during the summer and attacked the nearest trees.



## DON'T MOVE FIREWOOD!

**M**oving firewood has become a deadly threat to forests. Forests in southern Michigan have been devastated by emerald ash borer, and a quarantine prevents movement of firewood from the area. A number of isolated outbreaks in the northern part of the state have been traced to loads of firewood transported from infested areas. The danger of moving firewood is so great that regulations developed in Michigan include a fine of up to \$250,000 and a year in jail for moving ash firewood out of a quarantined area. Although emerald ash borer has not yet been detected in New York State, it has been spreading through the Great Lakes states, and is only 150 miles from New York's border.

It could take just one load of infested firewood to transport emerald ash borer into New York State. Many other forest pests are already traveling around New York in firewood, putting multiple tree species at risk. Asian longhorn beetles attack maples and other hardwoods; the Sirex woodwasp kills pines, and the hemlock woolly adelgid has destroyed millions of hemlocks. Beech bark disease, sudden oak death and gypsy moth outbreaks have also been linked to firewood.

Higher heating costs mean that more people are using firewood, increasing the risk of spreading forest pests. These pests can kill the trees in nearby forests—and they can kill the trees in your yard. Keep your trees safe; don't move firewood. If you buy firewood, be sure that you know where it was cut. Buy only locally cut wood, even if it costs a little more. Saving a few dollars on firewood may eventually cost you thousands of dollars in landscaping. All non-local firewood, both hardwood and softwood (conifers such as pine), should be considered potentially dangerous.

Take a few minutes to check your firewood. It's easy to see the evidence of insect attack in stacked cordwood. A few moments spent examining the split faces and areas where bark has sloughed off will quickly tell you whether the wood harbors unwanted residents. And watch out for "free" firewood. Maybe you're thinking about supplying your camp with firewood from the tree in your yard that's dying and needs to come down before it hurts someone or hits the house. Don't do it. Leave that wood at home. It's just plain bad practice to move insects around with your firewood.

Insect infestations often begin at campgrounds, because many people bring their own wood on camping trips, sometimes from hundreds of miles away. Many popular campgrounds in Michigan have lost all of their ash trees to the emerald ash borer, because of infested firewood brought in by campers. Many public and private campgrounds in Michigan and adjoining states now prohibit campers from bringing their own firewood. Firewood must either be bought at the campground, or obtained from approved local sources.

Having a campfire is one of the special traditions of a camping trip. Camping stoves certainly are more efficient for cooking, and are required where open fires are



Firewood can hide dangerous hitchhikers. These insects kill our trees! Never transport firewood.

prohibited, such as at high elevations in the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves, and in designated "No Campfire" areas. But a gas stove just doesn't have the ambience of a real fire.

You needn't omit the campfire from your trip; there are alternatives to bringing your own firewood. At some of New York's public campgrounds, you can buy packaged bundles of firewood that have been kiln dried, a process that destroys insect pests. Many campgrounds have local firewood vendors who bring in wood to sell, and there is firewood for sale outside most larger campgrounds. Or you might consider bringing a supply of artificial fire logs made from recycled materials, such as compressed sawdust, just in case local firewood is not available at the campground. Some types of fire logs can be used outdoors, will burn as long or longer than regular wood, have no chemical odor, and are safe for cooking. They can even be mixed with regular firewood. As you plan your trip, you may want to contact the campground in advance to check availability of local firewood.

The movement of firewood has proven to be a vector for the spread of deadly forest pests. The Department of Environmental Conservation takes this threat very seriously and is considering a wide range of possible actions to address the danger of moving firewood. Some of these actions include increasing public understanding and awareness through educational campaigns, voluntary incentives to encourage the use of appropriate alternatives to transported firewood, and finally, possible regulations to restrict long-distance transport of firewood in New York State.

For more information on the insect pests that can be transported on firewood, see: [www.dec.state.ny.us](http://www.dec.state.ny.us) and search for "invasive insects."

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