

DUTCH ELM DISEASE IN BEVERLY SHORES

BY TERRY BONACE, ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION GROUP

Most of us have heard of this devastating disease that destroyed so many mature elm trees in cities across the United States, particularly in the 1960s and '70s. American elm trees were planted along both sides of city streets. Because of the graceful v-shape of the tree, a beautiful, shady canopy was created. Unfortunately, these closely planted trees were also easily able to allow Dutch elm disease to jump from one tree to another. Literally millions of elm trees were lost to this disease in the middle part of the 20th century.



Elm Leaves

We have since learned to plant a variety of tree species along city streets to slow the spread of disease and insects. But Dutch elm is still killing elm trees. Dutch elm disease is caused by two closely related fungi. The fungi most likely originated in Asia, but they were first isolated and identified in The Netherlands, giving the disease its name. Beverly Shores has two species of susceptible elms: American and Slippery. The non-native and invasive Siberian elm is not susceptible.

Elms with Dutch elm disease first show signs of withering and dying leaves in the upper branches. The disease gradually works its way down the tree until the tree is dead. This can happen in one season or over several years. Early intervention by removing the first diseased branches can sometime save the tree.



Tree with Dutch Elm Disease

In Beverly Shores this summer, the Environmental Restoration Group (ERG) discovered three dying elm trees, all within less than a quarter mile of each other. The most obvious one you can readily observe is on the northeast corner of Four Corners at Broadway and Beverly Drive. Sadly it was a large and beautiful tree. The other two elms are located only a short distance away on Broadway (between Atwater and Leewater on a Shirley Heinze Land Trust preserve) and a block off of Broadway on West Ripplewater on private property. Dutch elm was immediately suspected. The ERG contacted two arborists who confirmed that the trees were dying of Dutch elm.

Once a tree dies from Dutch elm, the problem is not over. Several species of elm bark beetles lay eggs under the bark of dead or dying elms. When the eggs mature into adult beetles, these beetles fly off to other elm trees, carrying spores of the fatal elm fungus and spreading the disease to new trees.

ERG has obtained permission from both the Town's Building Commissioner and the Park Board to arrange for the removal of several of the dead elms. The owner of the elm tree on private property (Curt Kendall) plans to remove the tree at his expense, cooperation for which we are very grateful. We hope as well to cooperate with the Shirley Heinze Land Trust to share funding for the removal of its tree in Beverly Shores. The Four Corners tree is on Town park land, but given the Park Board's budgetary constraints, ERG will lead the effort to remove it. We are actively seeking funding support from other community organizations to help us defray the cost.

If you think you have an elm tree that is dying from Dutch elm or has recently died, we recommend that you contact an arborist for diagnosis as soon as you can. If removal of the tree is your only option, permission is required from the Building Commissioner so be sure not to overlook this step. If you have further questions, or want help in identifying your tree, please feel free to contact Terry Bonace (tbonace@gmail.com) or Candice Smith (candicepetersonsmity@gmail.com).