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NEWS

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Exercise Common Sense, Caution when Treating Trees to Control Mountain Pine Beetle Impacts

FORT COLLINS, Colo. — Mountain pine beetles have successfully increased their populations east of the Continental Divide, which means many landowners will be spraying trees during the coming months to prevent mountain pine beetle infestations.

“Northern Front Range landowners recognize that we can’t avoid the mountain pine beetle epidemic and its impacts, but there are a few things individual landowners and tenants can do to help mitigate the impacts of the epidemic on their own properties,” says Ingrid Aguayo, forest entomologist with the Colorado State Forest Service.

Spraying is a generally accepted method to prevent or mitigate mountain pine beetle impacts on a small number (5-10) of high-value trees, provided it is done before the beetles fly in July. Spraying in May or June provides the best results, and the chemicals usually are effective for at least one year.

When used in a safe manner by a licensed contractor, preventive spraying for mountain pine beetle typically does not pose as much danger to wildlife or humans, but environmental impacts still are a concern because the insecticide is toxic to fish and other aquatic creatures. Consequently, extreme caution must be exercised so the spray does not drift or come in contact with any water or wet areas.

“When considering any preventive treatment, it is advisable to contact your local or state forestry agency to discuss the best treatment options for your particular situation, as well as the environmental impacts and overall effectiveness of each option. It also is important to use a commercial licensed applicator if you decide to spray,” Aguayo said.

Commercial licensed applicators have high-pressure equipment and personal protective gear, and are permitted to apply restricted-use chemicals specifically labeled for use in protecting trees from bark-beetle attacks. These insecticide formulations are labeled for specific pests and contain additives that bind the active ingredient to the bark. The three pesticides commonly used to prevent pine beetle damage are cabaryl, permethrin and bifenthrin. When using any pesticide, it is important to read the label to ensure that the pesticide is labeled for the treatment of mountain pine beetle or bark beetles in general.

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As the beetles continue to infest a greater number of trees east of the divide, landowners and communities are being bombarded with solicitations offering new treatments that claim to protect trees from mountain pine beetles, but only a few options are known to be effective. To learn more about the mountain pine beetle treatment options best suited for your land, contact the Colorado State Forest Service district office in your area or visit www.csfs.colostate.edu.

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