



Tree Times

MORGAN TREE SERVICE
THE "VITACARE" COMPANY

Recognizing and Combating Pine Bark Beetles



In these newsletters I have always tried to provide some answers and information about frequently encountered questions and issues arising over my last 34 years in what is commonly known by many as “the tree business.”

One of those issues that periodically raises its ugly head is traumatic for pine trees as well as pine tree owners. Infestations of southern pine beetles and their sometimes equally destructive cousins can be not unlike a biblical plague when they invade host stands of large established pines. Very often these pines constitute important visual and noise privacy screening for a property. And while pines may not be the best choice for such screening, it’s also true that you have what you have and you don’t want to lose it.

Southern pine beetles, turpentine beetles, and ips beetles can all be implicated in the systematic decline and death of important stands of pine trees. However, maybe the most prevalent one in this area is the southern pine beetle (SPB), which also can be the vector for the equally destructive Blue Stain Fungus in ‘host trees’. SPBs

are brown to black in color and about 3mm long. Initial SPB attacks usually occur from mid-trunk to the lower crown. After the first arrival, pheromone and weak host attractants draw in the mass attack not unlike a radio homing signal.

Trees weakened from other stress factors such as drought, lightning, mechanical wounding, etc. are prime targets. However, even otherwise healthy trees can be overcome by large seasonal invasions of beetles. Healthy trees will usually put up a fight, attempting to repel the hostiles by “pitching out” the attackers with plugs of resinous gummy sap. Here the scenario becomes much like a medieval siege against the castle walls, a standoff in which the

have probably moved on. Large numbers of SPB emergence holes, approximately 1/16th inch in diameter, can usually be found upon close inspection.

Containment is best implemented in two parts. First, the infected tree or trees, including stumps, must be cut down and removed. Beetles overwinter and lay their eggs in galleries in the wood tissue under the bark. If left, this nearby dead wood can be a launching pad for more damage. If trees are showing signs of partial or initial browning it is usually advisable to include them in the removal list since a reversal or ‘cure’ is possible but not likely.

outcome is uncertain.

In most cases and unless pitch tubes are present, the first generally recognized sign of trouble is a browning of the needles in the upper canopy of a tree. Unfortunately, by the time this becomes evident, the cow is usually out the gate and the only reasonable response then is containment of the spread. This is important because pine bark beetles, whether SPB, Turpentine, or ips, will march down a row of conifers like a firestorm, going from one tree to the next.

Sometimes traces of sawdust (frass) can be observed at the base of trees under attack. This residue can be the product of a secondary opportunistic pest called Ambrosia beetles. Therefore, as stated above, at this point the initial attackers



Pine Beetle pitch tubes



Pine Beetle galleries under bark



Southern Pine Beetle

Part two of the response is to treat adjacent still healthy (fully green) trees with an insecticidal treatment. Because different beetle species will initially attack different places on the trunk and/or

primary branches an overall spray application of all wood tissue may be safest and work best.

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