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PINE ENGRAVER BEETLE ACTIVE IN THE BLACK HILLS

Mountain pine beetle isn't the only pest attacking pine trees in the Black Hills. According to Dr. John Ball, Forest Health Specialist with the Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry, the pine engraver beetle, or ips beetle, has reached an unprecedented population size in many areas of the Black Hills. There were more than 100,000 trees killed by this insect last year.

“The pine engraver beetle is probably a more serious concern to many landowners as this insect can be found attacking trees in land surrounding many communities,” said Dr. Ball. Unlike mountain pine beetles that tend to attack trees in forested stands, the pine engraver beetle can attack even a single pine growing in a homeowner's front yard.

The pine engraver beetle begins flying in late March or early April and adults can be found throughout the summer into early fall. There may be several generations of beetles during the summer. According to Ball, “The first flight of pine engraver beetles emerges from the litter on the forest floor and seeks out dying trees and fresh brush piles to attack. If brush or dying trees are not in the immediate area, the beetles may attack healthy trees. The beetles generally only injure healthy trees or kill dying ones, but due to the high population of beetles, they are now capable of killing healthy trees.”

To reduce the attractiveness of pines to beetle attack, fresh brush piles should be removed, either by burning or chipping, before the beginning of April. Brush created

during the summer should be promptly disposed of or cut into pieces less than 1 inch in diameter and scattered throughout the stand. Small pieces of brush dry out quickly and are not suitable host material. In addition, landowners should not stack green pine firewood near healthy pine trees as this material is also attractive to the beetles.

“Homeowners near current infestations of pine engraver beetles may consider treating their pines with a pesticide to protect the trees from successful attack” according to Dr. Ball. This application is best made before the first flight begins, late March, but there is value to treating stressed trees even into late spring if they have not already been attacked. Since treating the entire tree is critical to successfully protecting the tree from pine engraver beetle, homeowners should consider hiring a commercial spray company that has the proper equipment to reach the tops of the tree.

Evidence of successful attack are small round holes (1/16”) on the trunk and branches and reddish dust on the bark and at the base of the tree. “These same signs may occur with attacks by the mountain pine beetle or red turpentine beetle so proper identification is important to determine the treatment or even the benefit of treatment,” says Dr. Ball. For more information, landowners can contact one of the South Dakota Department of Agriculture, Resource Conservation and Forestry offices that are located in Lead, Rapid City and Hot Springs.