



Taking early action is often the best approach to avoid much bigger problems in the future. That is clearly the case with invasive shot-hole borers, tiny beetles that could destroy up to a third of Southern California's urban trees if left unchecked.

Unlike many insect pests, these beetles infest a wide variety of tree species, including many landscape trees that are common to Southern California HOA communities. Invasive shot-hole borers tunnel into trees, creating galleries where they introduce and "farm" a fungus to feed their larva. Over time, as that fungus spreads within the tree's inner layers, it disrupts movement of water in the tree. Deprived of water and nutrients, the tree suffers from branch dieback and breakage. Eventually, many infested trees die.

When landscape contractors detected the pest within Aliso Viejo Community Association (AVCA) owned parks several years ago, the risk was clear. Trees, mostly Sycamores, showed signs of stress and began to pose possible safety concerns as they started to die. AVCA tried to treat Sycamores in some locations but had mixed results. Therefore, rather than continuing to treat, our association choose to remove all Sycamores and any other trees that had been infested in an effort to minimize the beetles spread. Had we done nothing, there is a good chance that we would have lost a significant amount of trees throughout the community.

That tree loss would have impacted the aesthetics of the community, increased noise in neighborhoods adjacent to major roadways, possibly reduced local bird populations

By Marilyn Smith, CCAM

Battle of the BORERS

How an association promptly tackled a beetle infestation in its tree population.

and increased populations of other pests that the birds eat. So, at the same time that AVCA and our contractors have been actively removing infested trees, we also have been planting several hundred trees per year to try to replenish the trees that have been lost. Trees that have been planted are typically fast growing species like California pepper trees.

Meanwhile, the science surrounding invasive shot-hole borers and understanding of best management practices has been advancing rapidly in recent years. According to Beatriz Nobua-Behrmann, Ph.D., Urban Forestry and Natural Resources Advisor with the University of California Cooperative Extension, while just a few years ago, treatments for the pest fungal complex were often ineffective or at least unproven, today there are accepted protocols that consistently provide successful outcomes. Guidelines now recommend only removing "amplifier trees" — heavily infested trees with more than 150 active entry holes and dieback. For low to moderately infested trees, removal of actively infested branches and treatment with a combination pesticide and fungicide have proven effective control measures. In addition, several trials of biological controls

are currently underway at various University of California facilities.

As the AVCA example demonstrates, regardless of the control measures used, the most important thing is to identify the problem early and take action. I recommend that HOAs and their managers regularly inspect trees within their communities and work with a Certified Arborist to quickly take proactive measures to minimize the impact to their communities.



It also is important to keep homeowners and residents informed on an issue of this potential magnitude. As a master association with over 15,000 units, AVCA used a wide variety of tools to spread related information throughout the community including posts on the association's website and social media sites, e-blasts and an article in the association's quarterly newsletter.

AVCA currently is in the process of working with the city of Aliso Viejo on a grant for funds to supplement and/or assist us and some of the impacted sub-associations within the community. That raises another important point: HOAs aren't alone in this battle. A number of federal, state and local organizations including the USDA Forest Service, California Department of Food and Agriculture, CalFire, Orange County Fire Authority, Orange County Parks and the University of California are working together on a variety of monitoring and management efforts and possess considerable expertise on the issue.

The University of California manages a website (www.ishb.org) where you can find more information about this pest, including an updated list of susceptible tree species and resources on how to identify, monitor and manage infested trees.

Marilyn Smith, CCAM, is the General Manager of Aliso Viejo Community Association and a team member with Powerstone Property Management.



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