



County of Fairfax, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 22, 2015

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Stella Koch, Chairman *Stella M. Koch*
Environmental Quality Advisory Council

SUBJECT: EQAC position on the county's fall cankerworm spray program

The Environmental Quality Advisory Council (EQAC) has reviewed the County's fall cankerworm spray program. Several organizations have questioned whether cankerworm spraying is needed, largely because the fall cankerworm is native to this area and because it serves as a food source for birds. In order to review the spray program, EQAC invited presentations from representatives of a coalition of organizations opposing the spraying program and from County staff at the December EQAC meeting. EQAC concluded that the County cankerworm spraying program is important to avoid the loss of trees in Fairfax County and that the program follows accepted practices for minimizing the use of pesticides to control the cankerworm threat.

The County's Urban Forest Management Division places its priority on the health of the trees and health of the urban forest ecosystem. Urban Forest Management staff explained and provided references to support the widely held conclusion among forestry professionals that, while a single defoliation event by cankerworms is not expected to be fatal for a tree, a defoliation event makes a tree more susceptible to subsequent insect attacks and alters the quality of the leaves produced. With multiple defoliations, tree mortality will become much more common. While studies have not been conducted to specifically examine tree mortality associated with cankerworms in Fairfax County, the impact of cankerworms in other nearby Virginia areas, such as in the Richmond area and in the Bull Run Mountain area, is clear.

Both County staff and representatives of the coalition of organizations agreed that urban trees are more susceptible to being overstressed by cankerworms because trees in the urban forest face stresses that are worse than the stresses found in the natural environment. Examples of these stresses include the loss of native understory vegetation, compaction of ground near and around trees, and drought.

In order to address the threat of cankerworms to the Fairfax County urban forest, the County employs Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices, which rely on monitoring insect pest

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populations, determining the most appropriate course of action based on this monitoring and then taking that action. Trees are targeted for monitoring based on aerial surveys that identify areas that appear to be damaged by cankerworms. County staff only sprays when female cankerworm counts exceed 90 per tree (the cankerworms are trapped on a sticky band around a tree). The County has only aeriually sprayed four times since 2000 and those spray events covered less than one percent of the County.

In the absence of this spraying program, County staff and the State forester assigned to Fairfax County assert that they not only fear the loss of valued trees, such as oaks, but they also expect impacts on the birds, insects and other wildlife that depend on trees for habit. Moreover, this spraying program has not been shown to, and is not expected to, adversely affect any bird or insect population, including the overall population of cankerworms. The spraying program simply keeps the cankerworm populations from exploding in the urban forest where trees are already stressed from the urban environment.

EQAC appreciates the real concerns raised by individuals and organizations and hopes that the County will continue to pursue alternatives to spraying.

EQAC concludes that the limited and targeted spraying program is a prudent action to protect trees within Fairfax County.

cc: Edward L. Long, Jr., County Executive
David J. Molchany, Deputy County Executive
James W. Patteson, Director, Department of Public Works and Environmental Services
Keith Cline, Director, Urban Forest Management Division, DPWES
Troy Shaw, Chief, Forest Pest Management Branch, DPWES
EQAC file, January 2015