TOWN OF WELLESLEY MASSACHUSETTS

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# 2015 Winter Moth Caterpillar Update

In Wellesley and throughout eastern Massachusetts the winter moth caterpillar has been defoliating trees during the spring. Under the authority of the Natural Resources Commission and the guidelines of the Wellesley Integrated Pest Management Policy, the Department of Public Works will be deferring the ground spraying town trees to control winter moth caterpillars, unless an identified tree is determined in need of spraying in order to survive.
These exceptions will be treated with Conserve #SC, a spinosad based product, E.P.A. Reg. #62719-291. Hours of spraying will occur between 5am thru 10 am. and will not occur after May 30th, 2015. All treated areas will be posted for 24 hours before and after applications. This is the same strategy we applied in 2014, in which we found no trees in need of any spraying.

The reason for this strategy is due to a team of scientists led by Joseph Elkinton at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. This team released approximately 1,000 parasitic flies at Centennial Park in Wellesley on May 9th, 2008, to help biologically control this invasive caterpillar. In eastern Massachusetts this caterpillar has been stripping the foliage from many kinds of deciduous trees in towns that stretch from the North Shore to Cape Cod.

This fly, known as *Cyzenis albicans*, is an important natural enemy of the winter moth that has successfully controlled the moth in earlier invasions of Nova Scotia and the Pacific Northwest. Elkinton and his colleagues are confident that this fly will eventually suppress winter moth populations in Massachusetts to harmless levels. That is what happened in Nova Scotia, where the fly was introduced in the 1950s, and where winter moths have been at low levels ever since. It will take a few years, however, for a few thousand flies to catch up with a population of winter moths that numbers in the trillions. In Nova Scotia it took six years.

The research team is also confident that the fly will not cause other problems. Research has shown that it attacks only the winter moth, and will not attack other species of caterpillars.

For winter moth caterpillars affecting privately owned trees, we encourage that private property owners should consult with an arborist to inspect their trees to see if spraying can be avoid this and or next spring season. To find an arborist call 508-653-3320 or go online to **www.certifiedtreeandlawn.org**. For more information about the winter moth and other landscape pests, go to **www.umassgreeninfo.org** for pictures, fact sheets and updates. For information about the Wellesley Integrated Pest Management Policy, go to **www.wellesleyma.gov\nrc.**

Perhaps the only good thing about this pest is that it will stop feeding in June and allow your tree a chance to possibly re-grow new leaves. Still, your tree has been severely stressed and will benefit from extra attention during the rest of the summer growing season and through the fall, until the leaves start to turn color and drop off. During this time make sure your tree is well watered to help the recovery process. Also, you should not fertilize your trees during this time. At this point consider developing a management plan for the following spring. We hope that with proper state government support the University of Massachusetts Extension Service will be able to keep working on this program to introduce this natural predatory fly to control this pest. The success of this biological control program will work naturally to minimize the need for future spraying of this invasive and destructive pest that is damaging private and public shade trees in Massachusetts.

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