

Chemical fight against Emerald Ash Borer could shift gears

By Brock Weir

Aurora's chemical fight against the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), an invasive beetle set to lay waste to ash trees the length and breadth of Town, could be set for a new troop movement this week.

Council is set to consider an alternative course of action this week, in the form of a newer chemical on the market that might be more effective and cheaper than the TreeAzin injection treatment approved by Council in 2012.

The chemical IMA-JET is being recommended by Al Downey, Auroras Director of Parks and Recreation, as another tool in Aurora's arsenal in fighting the bugs. Ash trees on public land have already experienced the preliminary treatment with TreeAzin, but the presence of EAB continues to grow on public and private lands, said Mr. Downey. While the results of these preliminary treatments continue to be assessed, the landscape has changed.

Recent information obtained by staff from the manufacturer of TreeAzin suggests that consideration be given to treating ash trees in at least one consecutive year in areas where EAB infestation is moderate to heavy, said Mr. Downey. Unfortunately, this information was not available or provided by the manufacturer when the Town embarked on the treatment program. Staff do not believe this information was withheld or that the product was misrepresented as it was relatively new to the market and has shown good results in preliminary trials and testing in Oakville.

Nevertheless, alternative courses of action are now being considered as Aurora might have to ramp up the TreeAzin treatment, and the higher dose of treatment, the higher cost to the municipality. Enter IMA-JET, which was recently approved by Health Canada.

Unlike TreeAzin, which is a biologic, low toxicity, non-chemical product, IMA-JET contains the chemical compound imidacloprid which is highly toxic to EAB larvae and is applied in the main tree trunk at grade level as the tree roots flare, said Mr. Downey. The product is encapsulated within a sealed plug system such that no chemical contact can occur on the outside of the host tree. It is from the neonicotinoid family of pesticides and is currently the subject of controversy in the agricultural and apicultural industry as it has been linked to the decline of honey bee colonies in some parts of the province.

Although Mr. Downey pointed out IMA-JET has seen promising results in the United States, this risk to the honeybee gave Council pause in considering the recommendation at the Committee level last week.

The honeybee industry is very attuned to the use of any chemicals and we're fully aware of that, Mr. Downey told Council. It does not have any impact with regards to that within the confines of treating trees in Aurora. It may, as an agricultural use, but we're using it strictly as an injection pesticide within ash trees in Aurora.

This allayed most concerns, but Councillor Humfryes questioned whether Aurora should be the first municipality in Ontario to use the chemical in this way.

The U.S. has had great results and from what they can see there are no adverse effects, she said. I always love to be the first on stuff, but I am a little bit worried about this one.

On the other hand, Councillor John Abel said the chemical is something that is worth investigating.

After five years [it makes sense] to ask if TreeAzin is the best, he said. We have no metrics to know otherwise unless EAB has been here 30 to 40 years, but that is not the case. Like a lot of invasive species, it is on you and you don't know what to do unless it is too late. I understand broad spraying in agriculture is devastating and affects all species, but this is a very specific, isolated [treatment] and it doesn't really affect anything else than the tree in the application.

?Just losing one tree or three trees can put this Council in its tracks for hours. We're talking about thousands of trees right here in our Town. We have to be moving forward with the recommendation and paying attention to what other areas are doing to combat this destruction of our ash trees.?