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Non-Local Firewood Poses Threat to Pacific Northwest Forests

A recent poll shows one in 20 Americans move firewood more than 50 miles.

OLYMPIA — As winter arrives, people across the country engage in a centuries-old tradition of gathering firewood to fuel home fires, but a new tri-state campaign hopes to educate Washingtonians' about the dangers of collecting firewood from too far away.

Moving firewood from more than 50 miles away increases the risk of introducing new bugs and diseases that may kill native trees. To prevent the spread of these pests, the states of Washington, Oregon and Idaho launched an outreach campaign to educate people about the dangers of moving firewood to Pacific Northwest forests.

The campaign, funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, closely follows the messaging of a national [Don't Move Firewood campaign](#), which recommends buying firewood that is cut locally, preferably within the same county or region where it will be burned.

"Invasive insects such as emerald ash borer and the Asian longhorned beetle already have caused a lot of destruction to forests in midwest and eastern states," said Chris Christopher, chairman of the Washington Invasive Species Council. "By not moving firewood we can prevent that damage from occurring in our state and the Pacific Northwest. Buying local wood not only financially supports local woodcutters, it also prevents the spread of harmful invasive species."

Transporting firewood potentially can lead to infestations of invasive insects and diseases, which can lurk in firewood. These tree-killing pests can't move far on their



own, but when people move firewood that harbors them, they unwittingly enable these pests to start a new infestation. These types of invaders have devastated native species of trees such as the American chestnut, hemlock and the American elm— species that have been part of American forests and neighborhoods for centuries.

In a recent poll conducted by The Nature Conservancy, one in 20 Americans said they moved firewood more than 50 miles.

“Prevention is the most cost-effective way to deal with invasive species,” Christopher said. “This tri-state education and outreach campaign strives to inform the public about better choices for cutting and burning firewood to protect our forests.”

Recent studies conducted by both The Nature Conservancy and Oregon State University demonstrate how willing the public is to make behavioral changes relative to buying firewood if they understand the issues.

“These poll results tell us that when people learn why they shouldn’t transport firewood long distances, the majority are willing to buy it where they burn it,” said Leigh Greenwood, The Nature Conservancy’s Don’t Move Firewood campaign manager.

“People have the power to save their trees. They can help stop the spread of destructive pests by not moving firewood and communicating this message to others.”

Following are tips to help protect Pacific Northwest forests:

- Obtain firewood near where you will burn it – no more than 50 miles from where you'll have your fire.
- Don’t be tempted to get firewood from a remote location just because the wood looks clean and healthy. It still could harbor tiny insect eggs or microscopic fungal spores that will start a new and deadly infestation of forest pests.
- Aged or seasoned wood is not considered safe to move, but commercially kiln-dried wood is a good option if you must transport firewood.
- If you already have moved firewood, burn it soon and completely. Make sure to rake the storage area carefully and also burn the debris.

For more information about invasive species, visit the Invasive Species Council's Web site at www.invasivespecies.wa.gov/.

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