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State Launches Firewood Campaign to Reduce Invasive Species

OLYMPIA – When you're planning your next camping trip, the Washington Invasive Species Council wants you to consider buying your firewood near where you camp to prevent the spread of dangerous critters that can wreak havoc on your favorite recreation spot.

In a joint effort with the states of Idaho and Oregon, the Washington Invasive Species Council is launching its "Buy it Where You Burn It Campaign," which encourages people to obtain their firewood as close as possible to the place where it will be burned.

Wood-boring insects, such as emerald ash borer and Asian longhorned beetle, two species responsible for widespread defoliation of forests in midwest and eastern states, can travel inside firewood.

"A campfire is a great part of any camping trip," said Chris Christopher, chair of the Invasive Species Council. "A little extra caution can help protect the very lands we enjoy. We need the public's help to buy and burn firewood locally, not transport firewood beyond local distances or use heat-treated firewood."

Washington, Oregon and Idaho teamed up to spread the word about the potential dangers of transporting firewood carrying live invasive insects and diseases using a federal grant. The tri-state, \$481,000 campaign includes billboards and radio spots and other advertising. The billboards will be displayed in Spokane, Grant, Lewis, Clallam, and Whatcom counties.

People have traditionally moved firewood to favorite camp spots and even new homes without recognizing the threat posed by firewood as a pathway for the movement of invasive species.

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The three states are not the first to launch campaigns. Some states have placed restrictions on out-of-state firewood unless it has been heat treated. Outreach programs have been launched in most states, and a national Web site, www.dontmovefirewood.org/, provides information on not moving firewood.

Numerous federal agencies, including plant boards, departments of agriculture, and others support a comprehensive national firewood policy, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service formed the National Firewood Task Force to develop recommendations for firewood regulations, best management practices and outreach.

Despite the vast amount of forest land in the United States, our country imports a significant amount of firewood. According to a recent study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, from 1996–2007, the United States imported \$83 million of firewood from 27 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Central America, Europe, North America and South America. On average, 76 percent of the annual firewood imports originated in Canada. Imported firewood enters the United States through 27 states.

“The council’s goal is to get people thinking about the risks to Washington when they move firewood,” Christopher said. “We hope that people will leave their firewood behind, and then buy and burn local or heat treated firewood. It’s an easy thing to do and can save a forest.”

The Invasive Species Council was established by the Legislature in 2006 to provide policy level direction, planning and coordination for combating harmful invasive species throughout the state and preventing the introduction of others that may be potentially harmful. For more information, visit the council’s Web site: www.invasivespecies.wa.gov/.

Remember to be safe when camping and using campfires. Please look for local rules and regulations regarding burn bans during the summer fire season.

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