



CITY OF JOHANNESBURG

Metropolitan Centre, 158 Loveday Street, Braamfontein
P O Box 1049, Johannesburg, 2000
Tel: +27 11 407 7557
Fax: +27 11 339 5704

A City of Johannesburg Press Statement by
the MMC for Community Development, *Cllr Nonhlanhla Sifumba*

Too early to classify the outbreak of PSHB in Joburg a disaster

18 February 2019

Release: Immediate

Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo (JCPZ), the custodians of the City of Joburg's street trees continue to meet with its counterparts for urban forestry in government; research institutions; tree maintenance service providers and its internal teams to identify the extent of the infestation of the Polyphagous Shothole Borer (PSHB), which has killed off some trees in the City of Joburg.

The Shothole Borer is a minute beetle that embeds its larvae in the inner layers of the tree. The larvae, once matured, then makes its way out of the tree by tunneling holes. The lesions on the trees may vary based on the tree species to resemble 'pinheads' or a series of 'gunshots' that stifle the flow of nutrients through the vascular system of the tree, resulting in a tree that is visibly diseased – which compromises the health of the tree.

There are various dependencies such as the species, seasonality, location, and age of the tree that makes some trees more susceptible. This is often compounded by the fact that there are countries that are yet to find a chemical solution to successfully contain the problem.

While a few new sightings of the outbreak continue to be reported, JCPZ has noted that some London Planes along Jan Smuts Avenue, in Saxonwold have developed an immune-mechanism as some wounds are showing positive signs of the tree recuperating from the infestation. These trees continue to be monitored to scientifically verify that they are recovering.

MMC Nonhlanhla Sifumba, the Member of the Mayoral Committee responsible for Community Development, earlier stated that "while this is an exciting and positive break-through that hopefully signals the tail-end of the outbreak, we are also treading cautiously to ensure that we are guided by research findings to confirm that this outbreak is on its way out."

The PSHB Committee established by JCPZ has so far:

- Commissioned an internal research pilot project in Region B where the Shothole Borer is most prevalent. The scope of the pilot programme is to map infested trees; assess the tree's health and that of the urban canopy and test the efficacy of solarisation as one of the proposed interventions to treat and dispose of infested wood in the absence of designated dumping sites in the CoJ;
- Closely monitor developments in countries such Southern Asia, Vietnam and California on how the infestation is being managed;

- Engaged or established working relationships with organisations such as the University of Pretoria (FABI), Food and Agriculture Organisation for United Nations (FAO), Urban Foresters and the University of Witwatersrand (WITS);
- Confirmed that no pesticides have been approved by DAFF to control both the beetle and its symbiotic fungi. Concerns were raised with regards to the application of pesticides such as possible future litigations, damages to the ecosystem and other unforeseen risk exposures;
- Commenced with the propagation of resistant trees at its Huddle Park Nursery as part of its tree replacement strategy which will be informed by both its pilot research project and the research findings of FABI.

JCPZ is part of the PSHB National Working Committee, spearheaded by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and due to the lack of data is unable to classify the infestation as a disaster.

Sifumba reaffirmed that, “There are no known pesticides that have been approved for trials by DAFF. Furthermore, residents with infected trees on their property are urged not to remove a tree if it is not dead, unless it is the Box Elder tree, as it is known to be heavily susceptible to being affected by the borer beetle”.

Diseased street trees, except Box Elders that are thriving, will also not be removed. Residents felling a dead tree that is infested are cautioned to dispose the dead branches in a responsible manner within their private property, by covering it with a heavy plastic and to refrain from illegally dumping the dead wood. The heat under the cover of the tarpaulin, will help suffocate the PSHB and the wood can then be recycled.

The symptoms of PSBH vary in different tree species - from patches of white powdered wood called “frass” to blotches of oozing resin or gumming along the holes in the tree.

Reports received indicate that indigenous trees native to Southern Africa have also been affected, such as the Paperbark tree, Fever tree, Sweet thorn, Monkey thorn and the Box Elders, amongst others. The list of infested trees compiled by FABI is on the JCPZ website on www.jhbcityparks.com.

“We will work with all bodies and concerned groups to ensure that we tackle the infestation collectively, to preserve and protect Joburg’s manmade forest”, reaffirmed MMC Sifumba.

An open day is set to be hosted on 11 March at the Zoo Lake Training Centre for all interested residents on how to identify and responsibly dispose of dead wood affected by the PSHB. Residents who are reporting trees are also urged to forward an email to trees@jhbcityparks.com with the location of the tree.

Issued on behalf of:

Councillor Nonhlanhla Sifumba

Member of the Mayoral Committee for Community Development

City of Joburg

For media enquiries, please contact:

Jenny Moodley

Spokesperson: Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo

Call: 011 712-6615 **OR** 082 8030 748/082 906 1515

Email: jmoodley@jhbcityparks.com