Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
and
City of Minneapolis, Department of Public Works

Suggestions for Working Cooperatively to Control Dutch Elm Disease

Background

The number of elm trees that were condemned from Dutch Elm Disease has exceeded 10,000 in 2004. This is the third highest number since 30,000 trees were lost in 1977 and 21,000 in 1978. The effect of the MPRB Forestry Section budget was an increase from $8 million to $8.8 million. Of this amount, $5 million or 57% was spent on diseased tree removals.

In order to control the spread of DED, it is important to remove infected trees as quickly as possible. This is because the disease moves from tree to tree via the elm bark beetle. By eliminating dead elms the beetle has no place to breed. Fewer beetles mean fewer incidence of DED.

During the summer of 2004, MPRB crews worked 10-hour weekdays as well as Saturdays from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Even with this extra effort there are still trees to remove. This work is continuing throughout the winter.

In January 2005 the Minneapolis Tree Advisory Commission issued an Emergency Report that addressed the severity of the DED problem in Minneapolis. This Emergency Report was presented to the MPRB and Mayor Rybak. It will be presented to City Council's Transportation & Public Works Committee on 2/1/05. In preparation for the T&PW Committee, the following suggestions are being made with the hope that the City Department of Public Works can assist in the effort to control DED.

Suggestions

1. Establishment of a North or Northeast recycling site –

The MPRB Forestry Section has established a recycling site on MPRB property near Fort Snelling. At this site elm logs are collected from removals throughout the city. A tubgrinder is rented and periodically processes the logs into woodchips. This has dramatically lowered the cost of wood disposal and hastened the removal process because elm logs do not have to be hauled long distances.

To make this process even more productive, a recycling site is needed on the North and/or Northeast sides of the city. The MPRB would like to work with someone from the Department of Public Works or CPED to find such a site. Elm logs from this part of Minneapolis are currently hauled to the site at Fort Snelling. If a North or Northeast site could be established, the same tubgrinder that is used at Fort Snelling would be moved to the new location. This would have an immediate impact on the cost and speed of recycling. Considering

that the number of diseased elms is expected to be equally bad in 2005, establishing such a site now would provide long-term benefits.

2. Picking Up Wood -

The large number of diseased trees that are being removed from public property means that this wood must be transported to the recycling site that is located at Fort Snelling. It is important to know that Arborists do not haul wood. This work is done by private contractors using end dumps.

The traditional approach to tree removal has been a two-step process. It can be referred to as the "top now, flop later" approach. Trees that are too big to fall into the site available are topped. This means that the upper limbs are removed in preparation for dropping the tree. The second step is to remove the standing tree trunk by cutting the tree at ground level and letting it fall in the space available. This two-step approach is the most efficient way to use labor and equipment when operating in a congested urban setting.

The MPRB Forestry Section has been experimenting with two versions of this traditional approach. The first consists of hauling all topped material as it is generated rather than chipping it. The benefit is that Arborists do not have to spend time chipping brush. They can do more topping thus removing more trees. With this method it is still necessary to return to remove the tree trunk. The second method consists of doing both topping and removal at the same time. This way the entire tree is removed in one step and it is not necessary to return to the site.

In certain situations the "haul toppings" method and the "top & flop" method are proving to have advantages over the "top now, flop later" approach. This may be an area where Public Works equipment could be put to use. This could be similar to the way Public Works helped during the 1998 and 2003 storms. The MPRB and Department of Public Works will be discussing these options in the near future.

3. Posting for Removals –

In preparation for tree removal work the MPRB posts "no parking" signs on streets where the work will take place. This posting consists of fastening signs to trees using plastic wrap. An Arborist is assigned to do this work. If there is someone on modified duty and their work restrictions do not prevent them from posting signs, they are the first choice. However, in most instances when an Arborist is assigned to this task. This means there is one less Arborist cutting down trees.

If Public Works were able to provide an individual to do sign posting, the Arborist would be able to concentrating on tree removals. One individual could do this work throughout the city.

Submitted by:
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