Remove dead pines before wilt spreads

Trees killed by pine wilt showed up like a beacon in this windbreak.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture is encouraging Kansans with dead pine trees to properly remove the trees during the month of April.

This month marks an important time to prevent the spread of pine wilt. Pine trees that are killed by the pine wilt disease could be hosts for the pine sawyer beetle that moves the disease from tree to tree.

Pine sawyers are a fast-moving parasite that burrows into pine trees feeding on resin canals. Pine sawyers generally emerge from dead pine trees in May and continue through July.

Emergence of these pests likely will be earlier this spring if warm conditions persist.

"It is important to destroy dead pine trees in order to slow the spread of pine Wilt in Kansas," said Kansas Department of Agriculture plant pathologist Jon Appel. "Removal and cleanup of all branches more than an inch in diameter has proven effective in stopping or at least slowing the disease."

Trees that have died of Pine Wilt

Homeowners should take the dead pine trees to a nearby landfill where the trees will be burned. The wood may also be chipped or buried to stop the cycle. However, these chips should not be used as mulch on pines.

Wood from a removed pine tree also should not be used for firewood. Any movement of the wood or delay in burning it may allow the pine sawyers to emerge and start a disease outbreak.

Pine wilt is a disease specific to pines. Pines affected in Kansas include Scotch, Austrian, Mugo (shrub pine) and a few others. The disease is generally not found in native North American pines such as the Ponderosa and Eastern White.

Pine wilt disease is established in the eastern half of Kansas but can still be controlled. The disease has been successfully eradicated in several communities of western Kansas.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture, Kansas Forest Service, Kansas State University and Extension Service, landowners and horticulture groups are working to limit, delay and mitigate the spread of pine wilt disease into the western half of Kansas through the Pine Wilt Initiative.

Testing of suspect trees is a critical step in keeping the disease out of those communities where pines represent a large percentage of the forest.

In addition to removing dead trees, Kansans with pines displaying pine wilt symptoms should notify their local extension agent or the Kansas Department of Agriculture Plant Protection Program at (785) 862-2180. Symptoms include wilting and needles turning a dull green. If conditions are hot and dry, the tree rapidly dies, with needles turning brown and resin stopping to flow.

For information about pine wilt, call the Thomas County Extension office at 460-4582 or go to www.ksda.gov/plant_protection/content/350/cid/1276.

Check insurance before spring trips

Sandy Praeger

• Kansas Ins. Commissioner

With the spring weather blooming, Kansans are moving out of their houses and into their cars for more trips. Holidays, graduations, weddings and other family gatherings will take us away from our homes more this spring.

However, more people on the road means, unfortunately, more possibilities for problems and accidents. Here's some advice for Kansans planning trips this spring, courtesy of the Kansas Insurance Department and the National Association of Insurance Commissioners.

Before leaving on a trip

• Make sure you have your insurance identification card and vehicle registration in your vehicle.

• Double-check that phone numbers for your insurance company and agent are listed on the identification card. If not, jot them down to keep with your identification card.

• Use car seats appropriate for the age and weight of your children.

• Check your tire pressure and the condition of the tire tread.

• Check with your local insurance agent to make sure your vehicle policy is current and proper for the coverage you need. Check for any discounts that might be available if you have other insurance policies from the same company.

• Make sure your insurance premium is paid. In order to keep your insurance in force, your premium has to be received by the company due date.

• Check all the other vehicles vitals: brakes, battery, fluid levels, windshield wipers, lights.

• Have a fully-charged cell phone and pack your vehicle charging unit.

If you're in an accident

• Check for any injuries and administer first aid, if necessary.

• Contact the proper authorities and inform them of any injuries. No matter what the circumstances, always report the accident to law enforcement officials.

• Record the name, address and phone number of the other driver. Always write down the make, model and license plate number of all vehicles involved.

• Collect the names, addresses and phone numbers of all passengers and witnesses.

• Take photos of the accident scene, if possible.

• Make no comments regarding whose fault it is.

• Ask the investigating officer how to obtain a copy of the police report.

• Notify your insurance agent or company immediately.

With rental vehicles

Usually, with a short-term lease of a rental vehicle, it's best to purchase the collision damage waiver and any other insurance coverage from the rental company. That way, you can help avoid insurance gaps that could lead to contractual questions. Please check with your insurance company or your local agent to determine whether your personal vehicle insurance extends to the rental vehicle.

For more information

For information about choosing the right kind of vehicle coverage for you and your family, go to our website, www.ksinsurance.org, and view our publication "Auto Insurance and Shopper's Guide." The 2012 edition should be available by May 1. You can also find general auto tips at www.insureUonline.org.

Colby study explores water use in crop rotation

Farmers in semiarid western Kansas have known since the Dust Bowl days of the 1930s that incorporating a fallow period into wheat cropping systems is beneficial for wheat productivity. But a Kansas State University study also indicates that continuous cropping increases the percentage of precipitation that can be used by the crop.

In the first stage of an ongoing study, K-State research crop scientist Rob Aiken found evidence that fallow helps "drought-proof" the farms in western Kansas. He also found that increasing crop intensity by going to continuous cropping, the amount of precipitation available for crop production was increased, but less grain was produced.

"The wheat-fallow system accumulates water over a two-year period, producing a single wheat crop," said Aiken, who is based at K-State's Northwest Research-Extension Center in Colby. "Farmers really picked up on this in the 'Dirty 30s.' It's a long-standing cropping practice for good reason."

Tillage provides weed control but often leaves soil exposed, which can promote evaporation and erosion. Frequently, 80 percent or more precipitation is lost to evaporation during a fallow period, he said.

"With fallow, we're not very effective in storing water," he added. More intensive crop sequences use feed grains and oilseeds to reduce the fallow periods and increase crop access to precipitation.

"Our objective with the study was to compare water use, grain yield and biomass productivity for 10 cropping sequences, which all included winter wheat," Aiken said. Corn or grain sorghum feedgrains were included in nine of the crop sequences; six sequences were cropped continuously by including an oilseed crop – spring canola, soybean or sunflower.

"Our results in the first stage (2002-2007) showed that by increasing crop intensity, going from wheat-fallow to continuous cropping, we nearly doubled the amount of precipitation available for crop production," he said.

The difficulty, he said, is that despite increased precipitation, crop water productivity dropped from 221 pounds per acre inch to 145 pounds per acre inch. So the message is to proceed with care with continuous cropping.

Farmers use many different sequences besides wheat-fallow, which produces a crop every two years so is considered 50 percent crop intensity. Another is 67 percent crop intensity, which results in two crops every three years, for example wheat-a feed grain or oilseed-fallow.

"One of the objectives with this study is to look at 100 percent intensity," Aiken said, such as planting spring canola, which comes out in mid-July, so does not use as much water as soybean or sunflower, which is the most intense in terms of water use.

Cropping sequences included three-year cycles of wheat, feed grain (corn or grain sorghum), and oilseed (sunflower, soybean, canola) or fallow, as well as wheat-fallow (two-year cycle) and wheat-corn-sunflower-fallow (four-year cycle). Each phase of a sequence was present in each year in triplicate sets of plots.

Initial study results for the period 2002-2007, which included a three-year drought, indicated several trends:

• Land productivity varied with rainfall among years;

• Wheat productivity benefitted from summer fallow;

• Grain sorghum productivity exceeded corn when limited by water;

• Continuous cropping increased the percentage of precipitation which could be used by a crop, but reduced overall land productivity; and

• Stand establishment, timing, and amount of water limited oilseed productivity.

"Annualized productivity, averaged over all growing seasons, indicated that land productivity was greatest for the wheat-grain sorghum-fallow sequence and similar for the wheat-fallow sequence," Aiken said. "Land productivity for the wheat-corn-fallow sequence exceeded that of continuous cropping with grain sorghum and either spring canola or soybean."

K-State agricultural economist, Dan O'Brien collaborated with Aiken on the study. They found that greatest net returns to land and management occurred with the wheat-grain sorghum-fallow and wheat-fallow sequences. Wheat-corn-fallow also gave positive net returns but economic returns were negative for other crop sequences.

"Considering the drought conditions in three of the initial seven years of the study, the threshold for economic harvest was always met for wheat after fallow, but was met only in 70 percent of the cases for wheat after oilseed (continuous cropping)," Aiken said.

More information about the first study and Aiken's other research is available online at www.wkarc.org/p.aspx?tabid=80.