



## **Aftermath of Gypsy Moth Infestation Poses Risks to Electric Utility Infrastructure in Eastern Connecticut**

In what has become a familiar yet surreal sight across Connecticut, numerous fully grown trees stand dead and devoid of foliage at the height of summer. The result of last year's particularly virulent outbreak of Gypsy Moth (*Lymantria dispar dispar*) caterpillars, the multitude of dead and weakened trees pose an emerging threat to Connecticut's electric infrastructure, particularly in the Eastern portions of the state.

First introduced to the United States in the 1860s, the Gypsy Moth has become one of the most destructive pests in the Northeast, regularly deforesting thousands of acres of hardwood forest during periodic population spikes. Although trees usually recover after being attacked by caterpillars, the aftermath of last summer's infestation was exacerbated by the state's preceding three years of seasonal drought that left many trees already weakened and susceptible to further damage. Indeed, the persistent drought conditions likely contributed to the Gypsy Moth infestation, as the dry weather impeded growth of a fungus that normally kills the juvenile caterpillars.

Both Eversource and United Illuminating regularly conduct vegetation management to ensure that dead or sick tree limbs do not pose a risk to power lines. These practices were significantly refined in the wake of Superstorm Sandy and the October 2011 Snowstorm when downed trees and limbs left some parts of the state without electricity for extended periods of time. The vast number of newly dead trees stemming from Gypsy Moth activity, however, poses an additional challenge to preventative vegetation management practices. Although Eversource has devoted \$80 million to tree removal and trimming this year, the company's vegetation management director has noted that the result of Gypsy Moth defoliation is a much

higher number of dead trees to be removed than usual. The problem is markedly more severe in the Eastern half of the state, which bore the brunt of the Gypsy Moth outbreak.

Damage to Connecticut's roadside trees from invasive insects has increased in recent years, with both the Emerald Ash Borer (*Agrilus planipennis*) and Asian Long-Horned Beetle (*Anoplophora glabripennis*) attacking hardwood trees in addition the Gypsy Moth. As the predations of invasive insects increase in coming years, vegetation management strategies will have to adopt strategies to protect electric infrastructure to account for increased damage and mortality to trees stemming from insect activity.

Electric customers are advised to keep vigilant as to the health of trees on their properties and in their neighborhoods that may pose a risk to power lines. A licensed arborist can identify and remove those trees on private property that have been compromised by insect activity. Customers should contact their electric utility if they observe a dead tree or limb that poses an imminent threat to electric infrastructure. Customers may also contact their electric utility or municipality for information on upcoming vegetation management in a particular area. For additional information on invasive insects, the public may contact the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection or the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station.



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