

Dear Landscape and Arboricultural Service Provider

The City of Saskatoon is reaching out to arboricultural and landscaping service providers, as key partners in preventing the spread of Dutch Elm Disease (DED) in Saskatoon.

Dutch elm disease is a highly contagious fungal infection that affects all species of elm. Once exposed, the fungus (*Ophiostoma novo-ulmi*) blocks the tree's ability to transport essential water and nutrients, killing the tree. The fungus is primarily spread by elm bark beetles. As they emerge from infected wood, their bodies are inadvertently coated with fungal spores, which are carried to healthy elms as they seek out new host trees. The beetles are attracted to firewood and elms that are stressed, weakened, or have been recently cut or pruned. DED can also be transmitted through contaminated pruning tools and via root grafts between adjacent trees.

DED was first detected in Saskatoon in 2015, with a single confirmed case. Following the initial detection, occurrences remained rare, with only one positive case each in 2020 and 2021. However, in 2023 and 2024, DED cases across the province experienced an alarming increase in both their number and distribution, including within Saskatoon. In 2024 alone, we identified 11 infected trees across five neighborhoods throughout the city. If left unmanaged, DED can spread rapidly, killing many trees and severely impacting our urban forest.

The City of Saskatoon's DED inspection, prevention, and response plan continues to be in effect for 2025. As we brace for an increase in caseload this season, we are calling on you as industry leaders and experts to lead by example. Your adherence to DED regulations and efforts to educate residents on best practices and control are critical to protecting our urban forest.

DED is regulated both provincially by Saskatchewan's Ministry of Environment and federally by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). In Saskatchewan, the Forest Resources Management Act (FRMA) and the Dutch Elm Disease Regulations provide a legal framework for preventing the spread of DED. Under Sections 63.1 and 63.2 of the FRMA, municipal inspectors are empowered to inspect, manage, or remove any trees, insects, or diseases that pose a threat to forest health on both public and private property. By following the established regulations and best practices, we can limit the spread of DED.

Although DED is a serious concern across the province, Saskatoon currently lies outside the CFIA-regulated zone, meaning the disease is not yet considered endemic to our region. Much of DED control involves managing bark beetle behavior and habitat. You can ensure you are doing your part to follow the provincial laws by:

- **Not pruning elms** during the provincial pruning ban (April 1 to August 31). Cut and decaying elm wood is an attractant for beetles and may encourage insect dispersal to trees that would otherwise not see much beetle activity.
- **Disposing of elm material** at the [City Landfill](#). Do not take elm to the compost depot or put it in green bins. Dispose of it at the landfill as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours. **Elm disposal is free** for all residential and commercial loads in 2025.

*Note: To be accepted for free disposal **the entire load must be elm wood**. While mixed loads are accepted, they are not eligible for free disposal.*

Other types of wood may be deposited at the city compost at no charge.

- **Remove elm stumps immediately.** Stumps that cannot be removed must be debarked or buried to a depth of at least 10cm to remove bark beetle habitat.
- **Sanitize cutting tools** after pruning elm trees and between each tree with an anti-fungal solution. Effective agents include 70% isopropyl alcohol, bleach, or horticultural fungicide such as *ZeroTol*. Any tool that comes into contact with live wood must be disinfected between trees to avoid the inadvertent transmission of fungal spores.
- **Report** any suspected symptomatic trees to the City. Highly symptomatic trees will be removed immediately to reduce the risk of bark beetle spread.
- **Report and educate** your customers on DED and the risks of transporting and storing elm wood. Saskatoon is not located within the native range of elm, meaning it is not entering the city without human assistance. Elm wood transported into and around the city is the number one way that DED spreads.

Permits to store or transport elm wood for reasons other than disposal may be requested through the Ministry of Agriculture.

Reporting a Suspected Case or Regulation Violation:

To report a suspected case of Dutch elm disease or a regulation violation, please visit **Saskatoon.ca** and complete the **Request an Inspection of a Suspected Dutch Elm Disease Tree** form:

- [Dutch Elm Disease | Saskatoon.ca](#)

Be prepared to upload **at least two clear, well-focused photos** of the tree, branches, or logs in question. Ideal submissions include:

- One photo showing the entire tree or affected branch.
- A second close-up photo highlighting details such as leaves, bark, or branch structure.

Saskatoon's DED Response Plan:

The Parks Department continues to actively monitor DED throughout the city and confirmed cases of DED will occur in 2025. Through a robust and active management plan we can work towards keeping our caseload and tree loss to a minimum.

As a part of our response plan, every elm tree in the city is inspected twice per season. When symptoms are observed, samples are collected and submitted to the Provincial Crop Protection Lab in Regina for testing. Additionally, we are working to strengthen public understanding of DED and are conducting proactive sweeps to identify and remove stored elm material from public and private properties.

Our long-term strategy focuses on diversifying Saskatoon's urban forest. We are actively planting a broader range of tree species and working to incorporate new DED-resistant cultivars into our planting program as they become available.

Upon Detection of a DED-Positive Tree the City Will:

- Immediately remove and dispose of the infected material at the City landfill. Trees presenting as highly symptomatic will be removed immediately without testing.
- Sample and thoroughly assess adjacent trees to evaluate the likelihood of beetle or root grafted transmission. Based on the assessment, adjacent trees may be removed or monitored.
- Initiate an elm wood recovery sweep within a 1 km radius of the DED-positive tree to identify and eliminate potential sources of infection.

- Deploy additional resources for surveillance and testing of both private and public elm trees in the surrounding area.
- Notify the mayor, council, and the public of the positive case, and focus on education and communication efforts.

Appendix 1: Examples of Dutch Elm Disease

Dutch elm disease typically presents as early, unseasonal yellowing and wilting of leaves in the canopy of elm trees. This dieback results from the fungus colonizing the tree's vascular bundles and blocking the flow of water and nutrients to the branch tips.

The dead leaves will remain attached to the branch, turning brown and brittle (Figure 1). Initially, dieback is limited to a single branch, while the rest of the canopy may still appear healthy and green. As the infection progresses down the vascular system, leaves and branches located along the same pathway will also begin to die (Figure 3). Symptoms become most apparent in late June and July.

A characteristic sign of the disease is the reddish-brown staining or streaking in the sapwood caused by the fungus (Figure 5). When the bark is peeled back, this staining often appears as distinctive striping. However, not all infected trees may show staining.

Image Examples:

Figure 1. Flagging and wilting in American elm.



Figure 2. American elm showing unseasonal yellowing and flagging.



Figure 3. Progressive branch dieback and flagging in American elm following DED infection.



Figure 4. Unseasonal yellowing and wilting in American Elm.



Figure 5. Side-by-side comparison of elm branches: stained, unstained, and dead uninfected.

