

Piñon Pitch Mass Borer

Dioryctria ponderosae

Primary Hosts: Piñon pine, ponderosa pine. Occasional Hosts: Austrian pine, Scots pine



The larval stage of the piñon pitch mass borer can tunnel into the vascular tissue of large branches and the trunk. The tunneling causes large gouges, which ooze a light, pinkish sap (pitch). Wounding disfigures and weakens the tree and heavily infested branches may break. This damage can also attract the piñon Ips bark beetle to the tree, which can kill the tree. The piñon pitch mass borer is found in native areas and landscape plantings throughout much of Colorado and they favor trees in irrigated settings. The borer is attracted to trees that receive an abundance of water, produce succulent growth, and have branch cracking (easier access for larvae to enter the tree). Increased risk can also occur in areas with dense tree plantings. The adult is a gray-brown snout moth with white zig-zag markings, ½ to ¾ inches long.

Management includes proper watering practices for landscape trees, prevention of wounds, and proper pruning practices to allow for wound closure. Preventive trunk sprays can reduce new attacks. Coverage of the trunks during periods of adult moth flight activity and egg laying can kill the newly hatching caterpillars. However, coverage of the trunk and branches must be thorough, particularly around active wounds. Two or more treatments per season, repeated over at least two years, may be needed to reduce an infestation. In Colorado State trials, pyrethroids and Dursban have been among the most effective treatments. Experimentally, use of dimethoate injected into the root zone has provided some control in Colorado State University trials. Certain dimethoate formulations are registered for soil injection use.



Figure 1 – Piñon pitch mass borer attacking a piñon pine. The pitch mass is circled.



Figure 2 – Piñon pitch mass borer larva

Information from: 2017 Forest Pest Condition in Nevada publication, Insects and Disease of Woody Plants in Colorado, Bulletin 506A publication (2014), and the High Plains Integrated Pest Management website.