



Massachusetts Municipal Association

## MMA BEST PRACTICES SERIES

*Recommendations for Effective Local Government Administration and Management from MMA Policy Committees*

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### **MMA Policy Committee on Public Works, Transportation, and Utilities**

#### **Best Practice Recommendation: Develop a Sustainable Wood Debris Management Plan**

**BEST PRACTICE:** Address an increase of wood debris caused by weather events, pest infestations and limited disposal options by developing a sustainable wood debris management plan.

As changing environmental and market conditions affect the quantity and quality of wood debris generated in Massachusetts cities and towns, local government is increasingly responsible for managing and properly disposing of this debris. Contributing factors include an increase in severe weather events as well as invasive species infestations from the gypsy moth, the Asian long-horned beetle and the emerald ash borer. Managing this growing stock of wood debris is increasingly difficult due to the limited disposal options available to municipalities. The out-of-state market for reprocessing wood debris is shrinking due to the declining demand for paper products as Americans transition from print to online media, while at the same time quarantines have been placed on infested wood sources, which limits export options.

As with the recycling crisis, municipalities have seen the costs associated with hauling and processing their wood debris increase as a result of these factors. While wood debris can be processed and released into forested areas or stored for later disposal, both of these options, in large and compact quantities, have potential environmental consequences stemming from the release of carbon dioxide and methane gas.

Municipalities are advised to develop a sustainable wood debris management plan to address the increase in debris. A wood or tree debris management plan is a best practice recommendation of the American Public Works Association and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service. Alongside other plans developed by municipal public works departments to prepare for emergencies and eventualities, sustainable wood debris management is prudent and necessary.

The following are some recommended action steps:

- Develop a process for inventorying sources of wood debris (trees, stumps, shrubbery, etc.) within public rights-of-way, adjacent to public utilities, in public parks, and in other public areas. If possible, such an inventory should include

(continued, next page)

a mapping component using GIS or other software. Municipalities should also be aware of their responsibility, through solid waste and recycling contracts, for coordinating the disposal of wood debris generated on private property.

- Conduct an analysis of trees and other wood sources that considers their age, size or volume, condition, and ongoing maintenance needs.
- Understand the state and federal regulations that govern the disposal of wood debris in forested areas, the storage of wood debris for periods of time, and the export of infested wood debris to out-of-state sites.
- Refer to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation guides and advisories on invasive species that threaten forest health.
- Consider options for generating biomass fuel (heat and/or electricity) from wood debris. The Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources offers incentives to residents and municipalities that generate biomass heat, through the Alternative Portfolio Standard program.

**Resources:**

- Massachusetts Tree Wardens and Foresters Association: <http://masstreewardens.org>
- American Public Works Association Best Practice: "Urban Forest Management Plan": <http://www2.apwa.net/Documents/About/CoopAgreements/UrbanForestry/UrbanForestry-4.pdf>
- UMass Amherst Tree Management Plan Guide: [www.umass.edu/urbantree/mgtplanguide.pdf](http://www.umass.edu/urbantree/mgtplanguide.pdf)
- Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources' Alternative Energy Portfolio Standard program: [www.mass.gov/alternative-energy-portfolio-standard](http://www.mass.gov/alternative-energy-portfolio-standard)