

## State officials work to contain spread of destructive lanternflies

BY HYUN SOO LEE For the CDT

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Over the past three years, an invasive insect, native to China and eastern parts of Asia, has been recognized as a serious threat to agriculture and businesses in Pennsylvania.

Although it has not made its way to Centre County, the spotted lanternfly, or *Lycorma delicatula*, has made its name in various parts of southeastern Pennsylvania, causing major damage to grapes, stone fruits and trees.

In the U.S., the insect was first discovered in Berks County in September 2014, and has since spread to areas in 12 neighboring counties, including Bucks, Montgomery and Lehigh . The spotted lanternfly could make its way to Pennsylvania's other 55 counties, including Centre, although state officials say they are trying their best to prevent the spread.

The insect is unusual, as it feeds on several different types of plants, said Emilie Swackhamer, horticulture educator at Penn State Extension in Montgomery County. The insect damages plants by feeding on the sap through its "piercing, sucking" mouthpart, which causes a great amount of stress

to the plant, Swackhamer said.

“That’s not the only problem it causes,” she said. “When it feeds on the sap, it only partially digests the sap. It excretes a sugary, sticky, sweet substance called honeydew.”

This substance goes on to accumulate and form “sooty mold,” which is deposited on a variety of places, like cars and plants, and emits an unusual smell in high infestations. To make matters worse, this excretion, called honeydew, is known to attract other insects, especially ones that sting, such as yellow jackets. This can be detrimental to residential areas, she said.

“Say someone’s potentially allergic to stinging insects, so that can be a health hazard,” Swackhamer said. “So, it’s a quality of life issue, as well as a crop damage issue.”