



WITCH ELM DISEASE
FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY REPORT



METHODOLOGY

In April 2022, the City of Saskatoon (the City) contracted Insightrix® Research Inc. (Insightrix) to research resident awareness and behaviours related to Dutch elm disease (DED). This included two phases: a) a survey measure resident awareness and behaviours related to DED (results reported in a separate document) and b) a **90-minute video-based online focus group** to obtain a deeper dive into key findings from the survey. This report summarizing the findings from the focus group session.

Survey respondents who indicated interest in participating in a focus group were recruited to participate in the session. Participants were screened to ensure a mix of demographics were achieved. To explore specific knowledge gaps and key findings, emphasis was placed on young and middle-aged adults who have elm trees in their yards. A total of eight individuals were recruited, with seven attending the focus group.

Date	Time	Recruitment Criteria		Number of Participants Recruited	Number of Participants Attended
		Age	Elm Trees on / near Property		
Aug 04	5:30PM-7:00PM	18 – 34: 4 35 – 54: 3 55+: 1	Yes: 7 Not sure: 1	8	7

Participants were compensated with a \$75 honorarium in appreciation of their time. A moderator's guide was developed by Insightrix to achieve the following research objectives:

- Dig into the identified knowledge gaps to better understand how to reach residents with key information about elm trees and DED
- Further explore resident knowledge and perceptions about elm wood handling and disposal
- Gather feedback on potential City services / offerings to assist residents with elm wood handling / disposal
- Gain feedback on current and potential messaging related to DED and elm wood handling / disposal

KEY FINDINGS

Knowledge Gap

- Confirming survey findings, residents feel the elm population is a great asset to Saskatoon and show interest in preserving the urban forest.
- Generally, DED is well-known as a threat to the urban forest. However, a knowledge gaps exist with respect to:
 - Elm tree / wood identification
 - Signs and characteristics of DED
 - Handling & disposal regulations
 - What to do with elm wood if a tree / wood is infected
- As a result, many are unaware they have elm trees at their property limiting relevance of City communications about elm tree health and DED.
- Interest in learning about DED and how residents can help protect the City's elm population is high, especially among those who regularly tend to elm trees on their property.

A lot of people don't even know what they have on their property. So, they actually don't even know what they're dealing with, and are **not going to pay attention** to any sign or education because they don't think it pertains to them. I think **having people figure out 'hey, we're talking to you'** will make a big difference.

You **see the [billboard] signs** about the disease everywhere, but **the concept of beetles that spread the disease helped me understand, okay I better not trim** between these months, versus just kind an ambiguous concept of disease you don't really know where it comes from.

The mechanisms and how it happens and how it attracts these beetles, **got my attention.** So, I think more education around how it actually occurs, **how it spreads** might actually be beneficial.

I feel **I lack the knowledge about the disease**, how it can affect and why this specific period of early September is important for no pruning.

Honestly my only exposure is those highway sign that says 'don't bring word into the city'. So I think I knew what an elm tree was but I still am not fully clear on what Dutch elm disease exactly involves.

Elm Wood Handling & Disposal

- Most say they tend to their elm trees on an as-needed basis – usually in spring and fall. Just one participant has experience disposing of elm wood at the City landfill.
- Other methods of elm wood disposal include burning or putting smaller branches in residential black bins.
- Renters note tree-removal services / businesses being used to maintain elm trees.
- Top barriers to correct elm handling and disposal mentioned by participants include:
 - Lack of knowledge about specific regulations
 - Lack of transportation, truck / trailer to haul elm wood
 - Financial constraints
 - Confusion about what to do with elm wood
- While some are aware of pruning bans, specific knowledge about when to prune and what to do with the pruned wood is weak.
- Some mention a lack of understanding about the rationale for regulations. Education in this area is likely to increase resident buy-in.
- The most common source of information about proper elm wood handling and disposal is word of mouth – neighbours, friends and family. Few report independently seeking information about DED.
- Awareness of the fees associated with elm disposal is extremely limited. Most are surprised and discouraged to hear the cost of elm disposal.
 - Most are not aware of why high costs are associated with elm disposal (compared with other types of wood / trees) causing some unwillingness to paying the fee.
 - Some indicate acceptance of the fees as part of the cost of homeownership.
 - Those with limited financial resources indicate the cost of disposal is out of their reach.
- Current regulations and communications focus on what is not permitted with respect to elm wood handling and disposal, leaving residents confused and questioning what they can do with elm wood if they have it.
 - With restrictions on storage, burning, transportation and disposal, many are left feeling they are without options if they happen to acquire elm wood through any reason.
 - Residents are unclear about what steps to take. There is a need for clarity and direction about proper steps to take when residents are in possession of elm wood *at any time of the year*.

Young homeowner

Trees on property: **Elm tree, saplings and suckers**

Profile:

- Learned about the pruning ban from his neighbor
- Previously unaware he had elm trees / that they required special care
- Wants to follow regulations
- Strong interest in protecting urban forest
- Has elm wood sitting beside his shed, doesn't know what to do with it

I have elm wood in my yard. Because I cut some last year and just threw beside the shed. **But now I can't get rid of it until September, right?** Like I can't take them to the dump now. What if they turn me away and ask, 'why do you have this? Because **I'm waiting to get rid of it.** I haven't burned it. But I was going to use it as firewood until I learned that you can't. And that's one of the things I didn't realize.

Those trees are 60, 70, 80 years old and **I don't want to be the person that jeopardizes the entire neighbourhood**, you know? If it was my tree and I was responsible for the destruction or the spread of the disease that cleared out that whole **neighbourhood I would feel like garbage.** So, for me I would be like '**I need to make sure I do my part**', and I would assume my neighbours would do the same.

Hundreds of dollars do seem a bit steep just to throw it into a hole in the ground.

I did it because that is the **cost of being a homeowner** and you kind of have to absorb it. I didn't like it. But I had to just

It seems reasonable to assume **the cost could just be absorbed by the taxpayers of the city** so we can prevent the spread of this disease.

I would rather not have such a tree in my backyard. It's just an uncalled expense on my part. I'm not signing up for that

If it's a huge tree, you have to cut it up, throw it in a trailer, then you got to go to the dump to pay for all that? Thousands of dollars? **It makes people just want to go screw it I'm just gonna throw in the fire and burn it**, you know? So, I think it'd be nice to have some kind of incentive or

I lived a long time on the farm. If you have branches you would just burn it. It's kind of a no brainer for most people. I think [burning] is just the natural side effect of the disposal fee being so expensive.

I think the city should remove residential dump fees on elms period. The city allows recycling of every other tree free of charge, every other vegetation free of charge. But for some reason the elm trees get penalized.

Potential City Services for Elm Handling and Disposal

\$50 Cap at the Landfill

- Reactions to a \$50 disposal fee cap are mixed. Some feel it is fair while others say it is still a deterrent to proper disposal.
- Common questions:
 - What defines a "load" – How much can you drop off for \$50?
 - What if I only have a few branches? Will I be charged less?
- Most agree, the cap should apply to both residents and businesses
- Resident opinions on an acceptable price range for the capped landfill fee range from \$25 to \$50.

Most of my neighbours are elderly people on fixed income and they don't have vehicles. So, for them, it would be difficult. I think it would be great if it was \$50 a load. But still, **what constitutes a load?**

Because often people hire the business to haul and deal with trees. **If you penalize that just because you're a businessperson doing this job**, then that's not fair.

Black Bin

- Reactions to the option to seasonally dispose of small elm branches in residential black bins is positive.
 - Residents suggest small branches are not worth a trip to the landfill and they are most at risk of being disposed of improperly / burned.
- Common questions:
 - Residents question what they should do with elm wood at times when black bin disposal is not permitted.

I've got **a lot of little branches on my lawn that blew off** in the wind. I would like to be able to put them into the black bin.

It makes more physical sense like they're **already hauling away your black bean every week anyway**, so if that sufficiently contains a disease for the small clippings and then a

Collection Services

- Participants are in favour of City-run elm wood collection services and most say they would be likely to try it.
- Success of such a program would depend on cost and timing. Most note service availability is critical to help residents avoid having to store elm wood.
- Common questions:
 - How much will the service cost? Does it depend on size of the load?
 - When will the service be available? Weekly? Monthly? On-demand?

If they offered the \$50 cap at the dump, while others would offer to come and pick up for a lot more, I'd take it to the dump myself. **I'd do what was cheaper.**

How much I would be willing to pay **depends on what it entails**. Some branches? Or a whole big branch? A whole trunk?

Firewood exchange

- Most say currently have firewood in their yard / at their property.
 - One has elm but does not intend to burn it after recently learning about regulations and DED.
- Residents are open to exchange programs / free access to non-elm firewood.
- Common questions:
 - Would I have to pay to drop off my elm firewood?
 - If a free-exchange program were available, why would I pay a landfill fee to dispose of it?

Participant Suggestions for Elm-Related Services

- Communal / neighbourhood disposal sites
- Education / engagement focused on youth, schools to spark conversations at home with family / parents

How about small collection centres in every neighbourhood so the City is not coming to collect just a very small fraction. They are **collecting in bulk** and that collection centre **can be monitored for DED.**

There should be **education programs in schools**. It's always the kids that actually learn the fastest and they are the ones that would come back home and tell their parents all about it.

Message Testing

Bill Inserts

- Reactions to the bill inserts are mixed. Some say they are unlikely to pay attention to such inserts.
- Those who know they have elm trees on their property and those with stronger knowledge about DED are more likely to take the time to read a bill insert.
- Feedback on the example insert is mixed with some stating the messaging is confusing – if you can't store it, transport it, burn it or throw it away, what do you do?



Strengths	Improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrasting photos of healthy and diseased leaves <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Helpful, clear, informative ◦ Attention-grabbing • Bullet format <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Succinct, to-the-point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify what the "Important Notice" is about to help garner reader attention • Emphasize contrasts and graphics to make it more eye-catching • Include an educational section to help residents identify elm tree on / near property first to establish personal relevancy • Consider switching or removing leaves at the background due to distracting to some • Consider changing the photo of Spadina Crescent to something more urgent, e.g., photo of a diseased elm tree • Clearly state elm handling / disposal steps • E-bill design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Improve graphic design to attract user attention ◦ Provide more information on elm ID and DED ◦ Call to action – what do residents need to do?

I really like the visual that shows what Dutch elm disease looks like.

Having a healthy **side by side** with a diseased tree **is very helpful**. I would assume like 90% of the population wouldn't know either of ..

The healthy and non-healthy contrast photos are very impactful

A picture of trees to me is like classical Saskatoon and I would just automatically be like, 'it's just talking about the city in some ..

Making the healthy and wilted leaf **contrast larger** would probably catch my eye faster. Reason being like – oh, there's a comparison here, like what is this?

They could add to say: **'store it until this date'**, and then you can take it to the landfill.'

After stating 'you cannot store or transport elm wood', what if people have elm wood? **What needs to be done?**

I would personally read it. But I know a lot of people who wouldn't. I think scaling back how much information there is [would be good] so it's just a quick blurb on how to recognize and why it's important.

I probably wouldn't stop and read it because I only look at my bill to make sure it's not an absurd amount, and then it gets filed

Door Hangers

- Opinions on the door hanger vary. The door hanger approach improves relevancy for some as it is viewed as likely to be community-related.
- The overall tone of the message is off-putting and makes residents feel as though they are doing wrong or at risk of being confronted by inspectors.
- An updated design and messaging could maximize the benefit the door hanger approach.



Strengths

- Community-related
- Improves relevancy
- Piques interest in DED
 - How does it spread?
 - How would it affect my neighborhood?

Improvements

- Make the notice less text heavy – some lost interest / don't take time to read
- Call out the key message – first impression is not DED-related
- Consider switching or removing leaves at the background due to distracting to some
- Add elm ID, educational section about DED, or anything that build personal relevancy to the issue
 - Clearly communicate – your time in reading this matters, we are speaking to you.
 - Some suggest starting the notice with – "do you have an elm tree in your yard?"
- Downplay the threat of fines, or clarify what the fines entail
 - Perceived as a negative tone

- Some think more convenient to have City give ticket and take elm wood away

Too much text. Anyone would see the length of the text and lose interest right away. People these days have very short attention

This is an important notice? About what? That doesn't draw you in.

Most people would probably take that approach of – well, I'm not going through the effort of cutting down, transporting to the dump **if the city is going to do it for me and make me pay an ambiguous fine** or whatever.

When I have gotten the door hangers, I thought **this is particular to my block or my neighbourhood** so I would read it.

The second would **put people on edge and more defensive.** Like 'oh somebody's coming to check out my yard', versus like 'Oh, how can I help the community?'

I think people are so attention deficit that they can't focus for that many words. Bullet point is a really good way to inform people. I don't think people care if there have been cases or not. I just think people think, **'Okay, is this affecting me? What needs to be done? When is it going to happen?'**

The first one is better, kind of induces this concept of: **'Let's stop this thing together.** It's not your job but you might **have a responsibility to help us take care of this thing'**. Versus the second one just throws in regulations, it seems like: **'It's your job to do it. If you don't do it, we're going to fine you'**

Community Advertisements

- Opinions on the community notices are similar to those of the door hangers.
- Residents react negatively to the tone of the message on the right. It is perceived as threatening and does not present enough information about what steps residents can take.



Strengths

Improvements

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left: more concise • Left: more upbeat, positive tone, appeals to sense of responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve visual design to garner reader attention • Right: downplay the negative tone to reduce defensiveness • Reduce texts length, if possible use graphics and visual design • Add educational section to help residents identify elm (wood) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Induce curiosity ○ Communicate – elm (wood) owner are the targeted audience • Inform what to do, next steps
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Social Media Posts

- The social media posts are **well-received** by participants, especially the third one with wilted elm leaves. Posts are viewed as:
 - Informative
 - Eye-catching
 - Easy to read, concise
 - Action-oriented



Strengths	Improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left two: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cheerful, green, beautiful ○ Motivation to protect the urban forest • Third post: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Useful ○ New information ○ Actionable ○ Shows DED signs • Fourth post: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appeals to people who use firewood often 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Left two: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Focus on information delivery – some note posts not as informative / useful as others ○ Call to action – point out at least one actionable item

I like the two as the left. There are **cheery and green**. It's more of a positive message – 'hey we are all in these, let's work together to protect

The third one is quite useful. That's the first time that I knew that I could even send a photo of a diseased tree.

The third one makes me feel like I can do something, or I can click into it and might get more information, but also at the same time could take a photo and submit it, so I could kind of get a bunch of things done at once. Versus the first two – 'Oh, a picture of Saskatoon and then would have to click into it and MAYBE learn something.' So I am much less likely to click :-

The third one is the most informative for me. The first and second are nice. They look great, but **it doesn't do anything to help me actually understand Dutch elm disease** only like, 'hey this is beautiful.' I prefer to see a tree to identify Dutch elm disease because it helps me identify if have one of those trees. **I prefer the sharp reality** that the third one offers.

Radio

- The radio ad misses the mark with participants for the following reasons:
 - Does not stand out among other advertisements, not attention grabbing
 - Messages are perceived as boring and not engaging
 - Does not seem relevant to most
 - Not enough information is provided

If that would have been going on in my radio, I wouldn't pay attention. **There was nothing came out very strongly to me.**

Just another guy on the radio talking about trees I don't even know or care if I have. I think **raising the general awareness** of like **'hey, this is an elm tree, or like do this'** is a better idea, which is hard to do over the radio obviously

I think visual is a lot more effective. Some visual on the side of a bus, sending email with a visual would be helpful

Maybe making it conversational like neighbours saying, **'You can't prune that...'** **'Oh, why not'.** Then just the conversation would probably **make it more relatable, effective**

Winnipeg Contrast Campaign

- **The before and after contrast is by far the most impactful and effective message:**
 - Attention-grabbing, shocking
 - Engaging, elevates sense of urgency, responsibility
 - Effectively communicates possible impact
 - Reinforces value of health urban forest – property value, aesthetics, shade



This is not photoshopped, this is actually a before and after? **Oh my God that's effective**

The picture **on the left looks like Saskatoon**, whereas the picture **on the right looks like just terrible suburbia**, so it is **quite effective**. And I think the important thing to note this isn't

For me it is definitely a lot more effective. Because when I was looking at purchasing a home, **we specifically looked in neighbourhoods that looked like the one with the trees**. Seeing the reality that you know **if we don't play our part that we could lose that very easily** and then end up in a type of neighbourhood that we didn't want to live

Making sure people understand that this isn't doctored photo, this is real and **could happen**, sort of shock them. But then **empowering people to let them know that we can do something about it**

I have lived in both worlds and I definitely loved living more in the world with the trees.

People intentionally seek out neighbourhoods with big trees. **Reinforce why this is important** – improve mental health, increase property value, reduce pollution, cooler outside, air during the summer, etc.

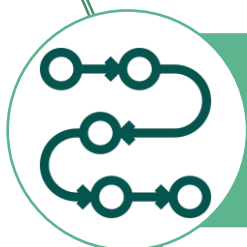
Almost **needs to do something to shock you and grab you**. Like, 'we're going to lose all our trees if we are not careful'.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATION



Interest in protecting the urban forest in Saskatoon is high. However, a critical knowledge gap exists with respect to elm identification as well as proper handling and disposal.

While most have heard about the risk of Dutch elm disease, specific knowledge is weak. Education in these areas is likely to improve awareness and encourage residents to follow regulations.



Residents need a clear action plan including instructions about steps to follow if they are in possession of elm wood. Current messaging leaves residents feeling backed into a corner with few options to consider. Creating a step by step action plan for residents to follow during all seasons will be helpful for promoting positive behaviours.



Use highly-visual communications to help residents identify elm trees and understand the risks and signs of Dutch elm disease. Use targeted messaging to ensure residents with elm trees on or near their properties are aware they have such trees and that special handling and care is required. Broader communications about elm wood identification and firewood restrictions will be beneficial for raising awareness among the general public.



The Winnipeg campaign tested to be the most effective amongst all others. The contrast is impactful and shocking, motivating residents to action and imposing a sense of responsibility. Use realistic contrast in future campaigns wherever applicable to garner resident attention and increase motivation to protect against DED.



Residents are motivated to positively contribute to a healthy urban forest but need support and partnership from the City. High cost of disposal and lack of access to a vehicle for transport are key challenges experienced by residents. City services to support residents in these areas are needed. Focus on providing low-cost, flexible and easily-accessible options for residents.