



**Bureau of Environmental Programs – Dekalb Field Office** 2280 Bethany Rd., DeKalb, IL 60115  
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## AERIAL TREATMENTS FOR *Lymantria dispar* OVER YOUR AREA

Weather permitting, during mid-late May, depending on the warm weather, the area you live in is scheduled for an aerial application to eliminate *Lymantria dispar* (gypsy moth). A helicopter will spray a biological pesticide Btk (See Below for more information). This could occur on just about any day of the week.

*Lymantria dispar* is an invasive species from Europe, is one of the most damaging forest and tree pests in the United States, and has become permanently established in Illinois. This treatment is part of a statewide program to prevent *Lymantria dispar* from establishing itself outside of the northeast corner of Illinois. We are also attempting to reduce the impact of its invasion from other states.

*Lymantria dispar* defoliates multiple species of trees with the huge numbers of caterpillars that result from an infestation. After a few years (1-3) of having its leaves completely stripped-off, a tree will die. Also, the caterpillars are a tremendous nuisance, as they may render your yard nearly unusable from mid-June to early July.

Btk is a bacterium that occurs naturally in the soil. Like other bacteria, Btk forms spores, but unique to this species, it also forms crystals that contain a natural substance toxic to certain types of moths and butterflies. When formulated as an insecticide, Btk is a stomach poison that must be eaten by a *Lymantria dispar* caterpillar to be effective. The crystals dissolve rapidly and paralyze the gut wall. The resulting "stomachache" causes the caterpillar to stop feeding on the foliage. The spores then invade the tissues and multiply until the insect dies. Btk may be applied by airplane, helicopter or from ground equipment. The effectiveness of Btk declines rapidly, normally lasting only about a week after application.

### How Btk Affects People:

Btk is not toxic to people or animals. People who handle and load the insecticide are the most likely ones to experience any effects. These effects could consist of minor skin irritations of the skin, eyes, or respiratory tract. Based on epidemiological studies and the long history of its use, there is no evidence that the application of Btk formulations cause any effects to people or animals in treated areas.

### *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (Btk)

We use Btk over residential areas because it has no toxicity to humans or animals. It affects caterpillars, and only caterpillars, when they eat leaves that have Btk on their surfaces during the 2 plus weeks that Btk is active. The Illinois Department of Agriculture has been using Btk in the Metro Area of Chicago since 1980.

Our DeKalb Office can be contacted at 815.787.5476. Or email [Nancy.Johnson@Illinois.gov](mailto:Nancy.Johnson@Illinois.gov) with questions. Keep in mind that our *Lymantria dispar* Specialists will be in the field on the spray team during the spray program. You can view treatment blocks (areas) on line at the Slow the Spread website. <https://www.slowthespread.org/pages/illinois-outreach>