

***Forestry Tip of the Day: The Polar Vortex – White Needles**

For a couple of months now, residents at lower elevations have been noticing the needles at the tips of conifer branches turning stark white. A team of foresters from Boulder County and the Colorado State Forest Service went out to investigate and we suspect the impacts are from the POLAR VORTEX! Remember that extreme cold snap in early November that abruptly ended our balmy fall weather?

So What Happened? Our trees were happily enjoying the abnormally warm late fall weather and had not yet fully “hardened off”, in preparation for winter. When the abrupt temperature swing occurred it damaged the tree’s tissue on the current year pine needles (located at the end of the branch). Next time you are out take a look around and you will notice many trees with white coloration at the ends of needles, especially on the southern facing side of the tree and top of the tree. The damage is especially common at lower elevations and in the cities on the flats. The white coloration, as opposed to red/brown/yellow color, is a telltale sign of frost damage.

Will My Tree Die? At this point we are not overly concerned, but we won’t really know the full impact until the spring, when the tree buds come out of dormancy. In the best case scenario, the trees will slowly drop their white needles and bounce back without much impact. In the worst case, the tree’s buds may have been killed and we may see isolated branches and tree tops killed. So stay tuned and wait patiently for spring to see how the buds do. If something changes we will write another forestry tip of the day in spring.

P.S. This time of year we are also seeing a lot of trees turning yellow/red along roadways. This happens every winter and is due to tree being located so closely to the roadway.