Spotted lanternfly 'quarantine zone' now covers most of Md.

By Christine Condon

Maryland officials have once again expanded the "quarantine zone" for spotted lanternflies, the invasive insects that damage grapevines and other plants.

On Monday, the Maryland Department of Agriculture expanded the zone to include Charles and Garrett counties, indicating that populations of the insects have been detected there. Now, the quarantine zone covers most of Maryland, with the exception of four of the state's southernmost counties.

Under the quarantine zone, businesses and government agencies transporting plants, yard waste, outdoor construction equipment and other items that could contain the bugs or their egg masses are required to obtain a permit. Employees must undergo training sessions on inspecting for the insects and mitigating their spread.

The U.S. invasion of spotted lanternflies began in Pennsylvania's Berks County in 2014, and has spread since into Maryland and several other surrounding states. Native to parts of Asia, the lanternflies feed on over 70 plant species, piercing trunks and stems to sip on sap, and leaving damage in their wake. The insects are talented hitchhikers, easily latching onto vehicles and therefore spreading to new areas.

A late-stage nymph of the invasive spotted lanternfly. **FILE**

Maryland's first "quarantine order" came in 2019, with Cecil and Harford counties, which now have established lanternfly populations. By 2022, nine more Maryland counties had been added to the list, and seven more were added last year. Now, only St. Mary's, Dorchester, Somerset and Worcester counties are not under a quarantine.

Anyone who comes across a spotted lanternfly is advised to squish it. The bugs, which do not bite or sting, are known for their bright red and tan spotted wings. As young nymphs, however, they are wingless, and black with white spots.

Residents also can submit sighting reports online to the Maryland Department of Agriculture, though reports are no longer needed for Cecil and Harford counties.

Maryland vineyards have reported some impact on their crop from the insects, but the state has implemented an egg mass removal program to try to reduce potential infestations.