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STAKEHOLDER TREE HEALTH UPDATE

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Phytophthora ramorum

I am writing to let you know that we have had a new confirmation of a *Phytophthora ramorum* (*Pr*) infection (Ramorum disease) on larch in Yorkshire. The symptomatic trees were identified during regular aerial surveillance by the Forestry Commission Tree Health Team, and subsequent field investigations have confirmed the cause as being *Pr*.

The site is located in West Yorkshire near Bingley. The level of infection is low but in order to help prevent the spread of the disease the symptomatic trees are being felled alongside an appropriate buffer zone. The total treatment area included in the Statutory Plant Health Notice is approximately 12 hectares with the trees to be felled being both larch and sweet chestnut.

As a result of this new infection in Yorkshire we would recommend that you take the time to survey larch trees within your woodlands and report any further signs of the disease. The normal route for reporting suspected tree diseases is to submit a report through Tree Alert at www.forestry.gov.uk/treealert

It's disappointing that we have to take this action, but it's been a possibility we have been preparing and planning for, given the capacity of the disease to continue to spread. Our plan is to ensure that the symptomatic trees, and any larch and sweet chestnut trees within the buffer zone, some of which could possibly be infected, but not yet showing symptoms, are felled quickly and before the peak sporulation period in the autumn.

Background on *Phytophthora ramorum*

Phytophthora ramorum (*Pr*) is a fungus-like pathogen known to affect more than 150 plant and tree species. First identified in GB in 2002, it initially infected mostly shrub species such as rhododendron and viburnum, and few trees. However, in 2009 and 2010 *Pr* was found to be infecting and killing large numbers of larch trees, mostly in South West England and South Wales, and also environmentally important bilberry (*Vaccinium*) in 2009. It is now found in all five countries of the British Isles. The organism prefers moist environments, and as a result the wetter, western regions of Great Britain have been most affected, but we have been under no illusions that it could not spread to larch crops further east. With its high proportion of larch crops, Yorkshire has been classified a high-risk area and regularly included in our aerial surveillance programme.

Pr can kill larch trees quickly (within one year of symptoms becoming visible), and larch can produce exceptionally high numbers of spores from infected foliage, by which the disease can spread and infect other host plants. Current control measures to reduce the rate at which this pathogen spreads on larch trees take the form of prompt sanitary felling to minimise the quantity of spores released into the environment during the autumn sporulation period.

As rhododendron and larch are the main vectors for *P. ramorum*, combined with the high occurrence of these species in the region, the key message is that stakeholders need to continue to monitor their larch crops and rhododendron, and report any signs of infection to the Forestry Commission. Further details on the disease and the current controls in place can be found on the Forestry Commission website at www.forestry.gov.uk/pramorom.

Biosecurity

These findings have been identified as a result of a combination of surveillance, survey work and effective reporting from individuals to help in mapping the extent of key diseases. It is critical that the sector works together to limit the spread of pathogens, and it is therefore important to follow the basic biosecurity measures. These include brushing down clothes and footwear before leaving woodland, parking vehicles on hard standing (where available), and when working or visiting infected woodlands, following more specific biosecurity measures such as disinfecting tools and equipment and cleaning vehicles, especially wheels and wheel arches. Further information is available at www.forestry.gov.uk/biosecurity.

Raising awareness

The Forestry Commission is keen to raise awareness of how to identify common tree health problems, and to provide an update on the key pests and diseases. We have established a Tree Health newsletter (see previous editions at www.forestry.gov.uk/pestsanddiseases). The Area Team have also been running regular tree health events to keep the sector updated on key tree health pests and diseases. Our most recent event centred on manging trees in urban areas and included presentations from Leeds City Council and the management the London tree resource including details of the I-Tree programme and the management of Oak Processionary Moth.

Support

Countryside Stewardship provides support to respond to tree health impacts through the tree health restoration grant. The grant provides funding to supply, plant, weed and protect young trees following felling due to a tree health issue. See the capital item [supply and plant trees \(TE4\)](#) for requirements; Support is only available if:

- trees are infected by Chalara dieback of ash or Phytophthora ramorum;
- cases of Chalara dieback of ash have been confirmed by the Forestry Commission or the Animal and Plant Health Agency;
- cases of Phytophthora ramorum infected larch and sweet chestnut have been confirmed by a statutory plant health notice;

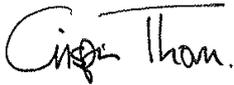
Support is also available through the woodland tree health improvement grant. The grant provides specific funding for:

- [scrub control and felling diseased trees \(SB1\)](#) - the current eligible tree health issue for SB1 is the removal of immature larch infected with Phytophthora ramorum;

- [rhododendron control \(SB6\)](#) - use SB6 to remove rhododendron that is infected with Phytophthora ramorum or Phytophthora kernoviae or is within 3km of a site with a statutory plant health notice;

I hope you find this update useful and if you have any tree health queries please refer to our website for further information or get in contact with your local Woodland Officer.

Yours sincerely



Crispin Thorn
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