The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has today confirmed a finding of the disease \textit{(Chalara fraxinea)} at a site in County Leitrim. The disease is known as ash dieback and it is a first finding for Ireland. The disease causes significant damage and has spread rapidly in continental Europe where it is now widespread in several countries.

As a result, the Department is carrying out a number of measures. Firstly, at this planting site Department officials are working with the owner involved to destroy the material and remove the risk of the disease spreading. The Department is investigating a number of other sites planted with imported ash trees from the same consignment which originated from continental Europe.

Secondly, DAFM is introducing emergency measures under the Plant Health Directive. These new measures being introduced by the Department under Statutory Instrument will require that any ash plants imported into the country would come from an area known to be free of the disease. This would be regulated under the EU Plant Passport system.

The Department is calling on the forest nursery trade and contractors to introduce a voluntary moratorium on imported stock from continental Europe with immediate effect.

Department officials have already been in contact with the forest nursery trade, hurley manufacturers, forest organisations and forestry contractors and will continue active consultation with these groups in order to brief them on the disease and the measures being taken.

Officials at the Department have recently met with their counterparts in Northern Ireland in order to co-ordinate an all island approach to tackling the disease. Department officials are also working closely with the relevant authorities in Great Britain.

Forest owners and members of the public are asked to be vigilant for the disease and report any sites where there are concerns about unusual ill health in ash to Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine by email forestprotection@agriculture.gov.ie or by phoning 01 6072651.

Symptoms to look for in ash include necrotic lesions on stems and branches leading to foliage wilt, dieback of branches and death of the top of the crown.
Note for Editors

*Chalara fraxinea* causes the disease known as ash dieback. The disease is relatively new and since 2008 the Forestry Inspectorate of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has been carrying out surveys to determine its status in Ireland. These surveys are necessary in order to allow Ireland to bring in emergency measures.

The disease has spread rapidly in continental Europe and is now widespread in several countries. It is likely that plants for planting and wood are pathways for spread over long distances, and it may be introduced into Ireland through imports of ash plants and wood, including firewood, from continental European countries. For this reason DAFM have also been monitoring imports of ash for planting, firewood and imported wood for hurley manufacture. The origin of the disease is not certain, and it is only known to be present in Europe.

Ash is a native broadleaf tree and is an important species in the Irish landscape. Currently around 10% of the ash planted under the Department’s afforestation scheme is from imported sources with the remaining 90% home produced. In addition:

- 3% of Irish forests are ash forests.
- 10% of the 2011 planting programme was ash.
- Over 70% of hurleys used in Ireland come from imported ash wood.
- Around 350,000 hurleys are used annually in Ireland.