GOVERNMENT STEPS UP ASH DIEBACK (CHALARA) ERADICATION MEASURES

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, has today announced a significant stepping up of its eradication measures based on the results of its ongoing Chalara survey. The interim results from the major winter survey currently being undertaken has confirmed further positive samples for the presence of Chalara. This brings the number of positive cases to 22, including 15 in young plantations, 6 in horticultural nurseries and 1 planted ornamentally in a garden. There have now been incidents of the disease in forest plantations in Counties Leitrim, Meath, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Waterford, Carlow, Kildare, Laois, Longford and Galway.

Speaking today Minister of State with responsibility for forestry, Shane McEntee TD, said

“While we are aware scientifically that the disease does not spread until the summer, we are intensifying our efforts in dealing with this threat and are destroying any ash trees that may present a risk of harbouring the disease.” To address the threat to our ash woodlands, there will be a major eradication programme on sites where there are ash trees from confirmed positive imported consignments. The Department will supervise the destruction and re-establishment of these sites. A re-establishment grant will be made available to the owners of private plantations which are part of the Department’s current afforestation programme. Ash plants from the infected batches supplied to other sites will also be destroyed.

The Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney TD, said that “the control measures currently being taken are the correct ones. The on-going use of surveys will assist in the identification, containment and eradication of the disease. He urged all owners of ash plants to continue to be vigilant and to be on the look-out for signs of the disease and to report any suspicious symptoms to the Department.”

Some of the samples sent for analysis showed only very slight symptoms and yet tested positive, making it difficult, particularly in the winter months, to spot the disease. However, the intensive winter surveys will continue until a full picture has been obtained and the Department will continue to review the situation and take the necessary actions to deal with the disease. The situation in other European countries is being monitored also.
Minister McEntee added “The Department is working closely with all the forestry stakeholders, nurseries, the NRA, the IFA, and the GAA to bring about an awareness of this disease and the actions necessary to stop this disease becoming established. Contact is also being maintained with Northern Ireland to sustain and intensify the all island approach to Chalara.”

Notes to editor

1. On 12 October DAFM announced the first finding of Chalara fraxinea in Ireland. The outbreak, in County Leitrim was associated with a batch of imported trees that was planted in 11 sites. By 24 October all 11 sites were destroyed by cutting and burning.
2. On 26th October legislation was introduced to ban the importation of plants from affected areas. On 6th November legislation was introduced to restrict the manner in which ash wood could be imported into the country.
3. Spores from Chalara fraxinea (Hymenoscyphus pseudoalbidus) are wind borne and are produced from June to September.
4. A grant for the re-establishment of the area of ash being destroyed will be provided under the Departments Reconstitution Scheme, provided that the forest was established under the Department’s Afforestation Scheme initially. The grant will include the costs of removal or destruction of the trees and leaf litter and the costs of restoring a forest on the site. This is being funded from my Department’s afforestation budget.

Forest owners are asked to report, with photographs if possible, 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, or contact your local Teagasc Forestry Adviser. Queries regarding ash trees in gardens or in horticultural nurseries may be directed to your local Plant Health Inspector or alternatively queries can be sent by email to plantandpests@agriculture.gov.ie, by fax to 01 6275994 or by contacting the Department’s Offices on 01 5058885.

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