



Phytophthora ramorum briefing - Spring 2011

Introduction

2010 saw the first outbreak in Japanese larch in Wales of the quarantine organism *Phytophthora ramorum* (*P. ramorum*). *P. ramorum* is a fungus-like pathogen that kills many of the trees that it infects.

Larch trees produce high numbers of the spores that spread *P. ramorum*, with the result that a large number of larch trees can become infected very quickly.

Over 800 hectares of larch have had to be felled in Wales, including nearly 200 hectares of young trees. The aim of felling infected trees is to limit the production of the spores that spread *P. ramorum* and therefore minimise the impact of the outbreak.

So far, 95% of the outbreak has been on the Assembly Government Woodland Estate but there have been three outbreaks in private woodlands in Wales.

P. ramorum has been discovered in European larch in England and it also infects many other plants (e.g. rhododendron, bilberry, beech, yew, western hemlock and sorbus). Due to the current major outbreak in larch, it is now commonly referred to as Ramorum disease of larch.

Who is doing what?

Fighting the outbreak of *P. ramorum* is a multi agency effort, with staff from Forestry Commission Wales, the Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera) and the Welsh Assembly Government all playing a part.

The government departments and agencies involved have formed a Phytophthora Project Board in England and Wales, along with partners from the private forestry sector and non-government organisations with an interest in woods and forests. These groups work in partnership and oversee and advise on all aspects of disease research and management.

Forestry Commission Wales has set up a Phytophthora Operational Response Team and appointed Owen Thurgate as its Phytophthora Project Manager.

Forestry Commission Wales has kept forestry and environmental organisations up to date with its work, issuing regular briefings and giving presentations to groups including the Royal Forestry Society, Institute of Chartered Foresters, the Country Land Owners Association and the Environment Agency.

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A marketing/supply chain group has been set up in conjunction with UKFPA/CONFOR and FC England and Wales. This group is a practical forum for the resolution of barriers in the supply chain and is facilitating through the marketing process the treatment of the disease in the wider interests of the industry.

Key statistics from the work in Wales in 2010 include:

- 330 - hours spent doing ground surveys.
- 16 - days spent on aerial surveys of forests and woodlands.
- 332 - samples from trees analysed at the Forest Research laboratory, Alice Holt, Surrey.
- 18 - sawmills/processors currently licensed to take infected material.

Plans for 2011

Working with our colleagues in Fera, Forestry Commission Wales have embarked on a series of aerial surveys to identify if the disease has spread, followed up by surveys on the ground. Two additional members of staff have joined Forestry Commission Wales to carry out the ground surveys.

Further work will be undertaken at research laboratories in York and Farnham to better understand the disease and to examine possible control methods. Work is also underway with Cambridge University experts looking at the most effective strategies for disease control.

Forestry Commission Wales is committed to harvesting timber on a sustainable basis and is therefore aiming to market the infected material from the Assembly Government's Woodland Estate within its annual timber production programme of 770,000 m³.

Disease symptoms

Information on *P. ramorum* symptoms experienced to date is widely available on the [Forestry Commission's website](#)

On larch, shoots and foliage can be affected and are visible as wilted, withered shoot tips. The infected shoots shed their needles prematurely. Trees with branch dieback may have cankers on their branches and the upper trunk may bleed resin.

Licensing and bio-security

There is no evidence to suggest that the presence of *P. ramorum* in a tree makes its timber unusable and there is no risk of further spread from wood that has been processed correctly.

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[Bio security measures](#) such as washing trucks between journeys and destroying the bark, which can harbour the pathogen must be followed when moving logs and processing the timber. Processors and hauliers have been given advice and support to enable them to secure licences to transport and process infected material and many [timber processors](#) in England and Wales are now licensed to process infected material.

Grants

[A package of grants](#) has been introduced to support woodland owners so that they can comply with the requirement to fell infected trees. Funds for these grant aid packages are sourced from the UK Government's £25 million *Phytophthora* Programme Fund managed by The Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera).

Grants cover the clearance of infected immature larch and support services provided by a [Phytophthora support agent](#) to private woodland managers required to deal with infected larch.

Felling licences for larch

A temporary halt on issuing licences to fell larch was introduced by Forestry Commission Wales until the end of May 2011 to allow infected larch to be identified when they have flushed with new needles.

Postponed felling licences will be processed from 1 June. Agents, planners and woodland owners will be able to submit new applications to fell larch trees from this date, too.

What should woodland owners and managers do?

- Go to the [Forestry Commission website](#) for more information and familiarise yourself with the symptoms and other information.
- Maintain vigilance and regularly inspect your woods particularly where larch and/or rhododendron are present.
- If you suspect your woodland may be infected or suspicious symptoms are present, you should report it to Forestry Commission Wales Grants & Regulations Office at Clawdd Newydd, Ruthin, Denbighshire, LL15 2NL Tel: 0300 068 0300, e-mail: bww.ts@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Next briefing

A further briefing will be issued shortly after the results of the first surveys are known.

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