

Department gives update on *Phytophthora Ramorum* Monitoring

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is continuing to survey forests and control outbreaks of the EU regulated plant disease *Phytophthora ramorum*, a fungus like organism that can damage and kill infected trees and plants. Under EU requirements, annual forest surveys for *Phytophthora ramorum* have been ongoing since 2003. Until last year, there had been no findings on tree species and *P. ramorum* had only been detected in forest areas on wild invasive rhododendron shrubs. Following the initial findings in Japanese larch in Ireland in July 2010, an extensive national aerial and ground survey was conducted. These forest surveys have now confirmed the disease in Japanese larch at eleven forest locations in five counties.

Japanese larch appears to be particularly susceptible to the disease, affecting all age classes and locally causing significant dieback and deaths. Noble fir, beech and Spanish chestnut growing in close proximity to the infected Japanese larch have also been found to be infected at a number of the sites and it is likely that the Japanese larch is the source of the infection. The infected trees are being removed to prevent the disease spreading.

There has also been a recent scientifically confirmed finding of *P. ramorum* in a single Sitka spruce tree. The infected young tree is approximately two metres in height and significantly it was growing in close proximity and underneath the canopy of a large infected rhododendron bush. It is very likely that disease spores produced by this overhanging infected rhododendron bush were the source of infection of the tree. This is the first field record worldwide of *P. ramorum* infection in Sitka spruce although the species had been found to be susceptible in international laboratory trials. Spruce in the immediate area of all the Japanese larch outbreak sites have been surveyed and no further *P. ramorum* infections have been found. The area around the infected Sitka spruce has been effectively quarantined and monitoring will continue.

There has also been significant number of outbreaks of the disease particularly in Japanese larch in Northern Ireland and Great Britain and the Department is liaising closely with the relevant authorities.

The Department continues to take all necessary measures to establish the extent of the infection and to control the spread of the disease. Forest owners are requested to be particularly vigilant and as the summer growing season commences to report any unusual symptoms of ill health in larch or other species to the Forest Service of the Department. For further information on the disease please see www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests-service or email forestprotection@agriculture.gov.ie

Note for Editors

1. In the mid-1990s, it was reported that significant numbers of trees and other plant species were being damaged or killed in California and other parts of the western United States by a newly described disease, caused by a new species of fungus like organism named *Phytophthora ramorum*. The common name for the disease, Sudden Oak Death, which was first assigned in the USA, is a misnomer in a European context as to date European oak species have not been seriously damaged. The same organism had also been found in many European countries including Ireland, on the shrub species *Rhododendron* and *Viburnum spp.*
2. Scientific evidence indicates that Japanese larch can produce *P. ramorum* infection spores at a higher rate than rhododendron and that the disease can be dispersed by the movement of plants and plant products and by the movement of contaminated soil. The disease can also be dispersed by rain, mists and air currents.
3. Legislation was introduced in 2002 under Commission Decision 2002/757/EC on provisional emergency phytosanitary measures to prevent the introduction into and the spread within the Community of *Phytophthora ramorum* (as amended). The Department under the legislation is therefore requiring felling of all infected trees with a view to minimising the spread of the disease.
4. The felling associated with the 11 confirmed Japanese larch outbreak sites amounts to approximately 125 ha of forest. Most of the wood from infected trees can be utilised and sold in the normal way when the necessary prescribed hygiene measures are taken during felling, transport and processing in approved sawmills and other wood processing facilities.