

FCS BRIEFING NOTE ON AWARENESS of

Chalara fraxinea – Chalara dieback of ash in Great Britain

The purpose of this FCS Briefing Note is to raise your awareness of a new threat to tree health, the highly destructive Chalara dieback of ash trees, caused by the *Chalara fraxinea* fungus. It is particularly important that you are aware of this disease if you, or any of your clients, intend to plant ash under a SRDP Rural Priorities grant or in relation to a conditional Felling Licence.

Background

Chalara dieback of ash (*C. fraxinea*) has caused widespread death in ash trees across continental Europe, especially in common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), including its 'Pendula' ornamental variety. *Fraxinus angustifolia* is also susceptible. Chalara dieback of ash is particularly destructive of young ash plants, killing them within one growing season of symptoms becoming visible. Older trees can survive initial attacks, but tend to succumb eventually after several seasons of infection.

Until recently this disease was unknown in Great Britain, but the first cases were confirmed in the nursery trade in England in 2012, then in recent plantings of young ash trees in Leicestershire and Scotland. It is most likely that the fungus entered Britain on young ash plants imported from nurseries in continental Europe.

We are treating *C. fraxinea* as a 'quarantine' plant pathogen, which means that we can take legally enforceable action to contain or eradicate the fungus when it is found. This is being done by using Statutory Plant Health Notices which we serve on site owners. The Notice requires the owner of the land to remove and destroy affected plants by burning or deep burial on site. Equivalent measures will be taken on land managed by the Forestry Commission.

If you intend planting ash under the SRDP Rural Priorities scheme or under the terms of a Conditional Felling Licence, then you should give careful consideration to the possibility that you could, unknowingly, be supplied with *C. fraxinea* infected trees. This could lead to widespread death of ash in your planting project, and the need for additional expense in replacing the dead trees and potentially the reclaim of the planting grant. As of 8th October 2012, grant support for planting ash will be offered only where you can demonstrate that your ash is coming from a disease-free source. We are making this change to reduce the risk of the disease spreading widely across Scotland.

If you are concerned about this new tree disease threat please contact your local FCS Conservancy office. We can discuss and agree with you through a variation in your Rural Priorities grant contract (provided you also meet the variations' business rules' requirements present at time of variation request) or a variation in the Felling Licence conditions, the planting of alternative species if this is something you want to do to reduce the risk of disease related tree deaths.

[See Annex for further information.](#)



Annex

Information and advice

1. Be vigilant – Chalara dieback of ash could appear in ash trees anywhere in Britain, especially where young trees imported from continental Europe have been planted. Early action is essential if we are to eradicate this disease from Britain before it becomes established. We have not found any evidence of Chalara dieback in ash trees outside nurseries and recent plantings, that is, we have not found any evidence that it has spread from new plantings into longer-established woodlands and hedgerows etc in the wider natural environment, and this gives cause for hope that it is not too late.

We therefore urge you to inspect frequently any ash trees in your care, and especially any which have been planted during the past five or so years. Make yourself familiar with the symptoms of Chalara dieback from the material on our website at www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara. There are other causes of ash dieback, so it is important to distinguish them from Chalara. However, if in doubt, report it.

2. Report it - Report suspicious symptoms to one of the following:

Forest Research Tree Health Diagnostic and Advisory Service
T: 01420 23000;
E: ddas.ah@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Forestry Commission Plant Health Service
T: 0131 314 6414;
E: plant.health@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Fera Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate
T: 01904 465625;
E: planthealth.info@fera.gsi.gov.uk.

3. Buy with care – Be careful when buying plants to buy only from reputable suppliers, and specify disease-free stock. A list of countries where *C. fraxinea* is known to be present is available in the Questions and Answers document on our website at www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara.

4. Be diligent - Practise good plant hygiene and biosecurity in your own gardens and woodlands etc to prevent accidental spread of plant diseases. See our 'Biosecurity Guidance' document available at www.forestry.gov.uk/pestanddiseases for advice on basic hygiene and biosecurity measures you can take.

5. Keep up to date – Check our website regularly at www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara for updates on developments. 'Follow' our Tree Pest News account on Twitter at www.twitter.com/treepestnews to receive rapid intelligence of new developments, delivered by text or email. (Information about a wide range of other tree pests and diseases can be accessed via our www.forestry.gov.uk/pestanddiseases page.)

Rapid Pest Risk Analysis

Views are invited on a Rapid Pest Risk Assessment for *C. fraxinea*. The risk assessment has been drafted by plant disease scientists at the Forestry Commission's Forest Research agency. It assesses the risks to the United Kingdom's ash trees, the feasibility and practicality of eradicating the outbreaks which have been found, and measures to prevent more outbreaks occurring.



The Commission and the Food & Environment Research Agency (Fera) are now inviting comments and suggestions on the assessment, and on options for a control strategy. If an eradication strategy is adopted, the risk assessment will be used as evidence to support a case for national legislation to strengthen the UK's protection from accidental introductions of *C. fraxinea*. Information on the consultation can be found at www.fera.defra.gov.uk/plants/consultations/index.cfm

Plant Health Notices

Owners of any ash plants found to be infected will be served Plant Health Notices requiring them to destroy the plants, either by burning or deep burial on site. All ash plants in a new-planting site will require to be destroyed, regardless of whether some do not have symptoms. This is because experience with other plant diseases shows that we must presume that asymptomatic plants in close proximity to symptomatic plants are almost certainly infected, but are not yet showing symptoms. However, we hope that if all parties act quickly now, few people will be affected by these measures.

Compensation

Unfortunately we are unable to offer any compensation for plants destroyed in order to comply with a Plant Health Notice. It is felt that the available resources are best used for surveillance and eradication work. Plants are therefore purchased and planted at buyers' risk, and any questions about recompense would be between the customer and supplier of the plants involved. However, we hope that few people will be put in this position if all parties move quickly now to tackle this disease.

Timber

The implications for growers of ash for the timber trade would be significant if the disease were to become established in Britain. The timber in infected trees might still be usable for some purposes. However, should it get to the stage where it is infecting mature timber trees, biosecurity measures similar to those applying to larch trees infected with *Phytophthora ramorum* would be required to ensure that the disease is not spread further by timber movement. Again, however, we hope that rapid action now by all parties will avert this scenario.

Further information

As well as our dedicated web pages about *C. fraxinea* at www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara, there is further information on the EPPO website at www.eppo.int/QUARANTINE/Alert_List/fungi/Chalara_fraxinea.htm

For further help or information, please contact the woodland officer for your area (look under 'Area' offices for England and Wales, and 'Conservancy' offices in Scotland, in the '[Contact Us](#)' area of our website), or contact our Plant Health Service at:

Plant Health Service
Forestry Commission
Silvan House
231 Corstorphine Road
Edinburgh
EH12 7AT
Tel: 0131 314 6214
Email: plant.health@forestry.gsi.gov.uk