

What to do if you think you've seen an Emergency Plant Pest or Disease

A summary guide for Tasmanian Government staff *(Current as at July 2010)*

All Tasmanian government employees are obliged to report anything they suspect may be an emergency plant pest

Please note that the term "emergency plant pest" includes an emergency plant disease.

What is an Emergency Plant Pest (EPP)?

- a known exotic plant pest
- a variant of a form of a plant pest already established in Australia
- a serious plant pest of unknown or uncertain origin which may be entirely new, or
- a plant pest that is officially controlled in Australia but requires significant emergency response to reduce the risk of a large scale epidemic or serious loss of market access.

Early detection and reporting of potential EPP incursions is critical to prevent a major pest or disease outbreak that could negatively affect Tasmania's unique environmental values, damage Tasmania's market image, or affect the profitability of Tasmania's plant industries.

What should I do if I suspect an Emergency Plant Pest?

If you suspect a pest outbreak or have seen something unusual but you are not sure whether it is an EPP – report it!

It is helpful if you can provide some basic information to help determine the most appropriate course of action.

Don't worry if you don't have all the information. Any information you can gather is useful.

Examples of the type of information from the site of detection that are useful might include:

- the plant pest that is suspected to be present
- a detailed description of the pest symptoms present and damage to the plant
- the level of pest infestation or infection eg. 30% of plants are affected, and the number of plants in total
- the distribution of pest infestation or infection eg. scattered or in groups
- details of the host plant including common name, species name and/or variety, age and developmental stage

- details of the growing situation eg. orchard, broad acre, home garden, bushland, parklands
- equipment or product movement that has occurred or is about to occur into or from the affected site
- recent prevailing weather conditions, and/or
- any other relevant information (or photographs).

The affected plants will need to be inspected by a Quarantine Officer and/or diagnostician, so you will need to record:

- the name, address and telephone number of the property owner
- clear directions on how to access the property and affected plants
- a detailed location of the affected plants including, if possible, Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates for latitude and longitude. Alternatively, mark the site on a map or sketch a map to identify the detection site, and
- if possible, mark the affected plants eg. with flagging tape.

You need to report this information to:

- your supervisor or manager, OR (if they are not available)
- the Chief Plant Health Manager on 6421 7601, 0418 129 229 or email andrew.bishop@dpiwwe.tas.gov.au, OR (if after hours)
- the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

Important precautions

In the case of a suspect EPP, it is very important that you take appropriate biosecurity precautions:

- avoid or minimise touching or disturbing the affected plants to reduce the risk of spreading the pest
- clean and disinfect your hands and any equipment that has been in contact with affected plants

- remove all soil and plant material from your boots, clothes, equipment that you may have come into contact with at the site
- take reasonable action to isolate the affected area to avoid the risk of spreading the pest. For example, ask the property owner to restrict access to the area and/or use interim containment measures such as closing glasshouse buildings, and
- avoid coming into contact with other potential host plants or visiting other properties where potential host plants are grown until after you have showered and changed clothing and footwear.

Reporting Obligations

The Tasmanian Government is a signatory to the Emergency Plant Pest Response Deed (EPPRD) and, as such, all Tasmanian Government employees are obliged to report and assist in the response to EPP incursions.

Although the Biosecurity and Product Integrity Division is responsible for leading a response to EPP incursions, other DPIPWE staff have important roles in supporting response activities via the Biosecurity Emergency Preparedness Program (BEPP).

There are currently more than 150 DPIPWE staff who are members of the Biosecurity Emergency Response Team. If you are not a member and wish to please contact the Emergency Management Coordinator on 6233 2004.

The Manager of Biosecurity and Plant Health Branch has specific obligations in relation to reporting EPP incursions. As Chief Plant Health Manager (CPHM) for Tasmania that person must notify Australia's Chief Plant Protection Officer within 24 hours of becoming aware of an EPP incident. Under the EPPRD, an incident is defined as the occurrence of a confirmed or reasonable held suspicion of an EPP.

When you call your supervisor, CPHM, or the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline to report a suspect detection, the CPHM will advise the Manager (Quarantine Services) and the General Manager (Biosecurity and Product Integrity) of the detection. This then initiates a formal series of first response steps that aims to address the suspect EPP in a timely and effective manner.

Communications and Confidentiality

The decision when and how to announce any suspect emergency pest is one that requires much

consultation and thought. A premature public announcement may have consequences for the property owner and for the investigation of the suspect case.

In most cases, a public alert is not made until there is scientific evidence that the suspect case is, or is likely to be, an EPP.

At a national level, the Chief Plant Protection Officer or delegate, is the only person authorised to make that decision and any public alert will be made via national processes.

If the matter is of State concern only, that decision will be made by the General Manager (Biosecurity and Product Integrity) in consultation with the Chief Plant Health Manager and Manager of Quarantine Services Branch. Any public alert will then be made through DPIPWE's formal communication process.

DPIPWE staff involved, either directly or indirectly, in investigating the suspect case must not pre-empt any public announcement and therefore must maintain confidentiality about the suspect case and its location until advised otherwise.

Further Information

Chief Plant Health Manager
Tel: 6421 7634
Email: andrew.bishop@dipwe.tas.gov.au

Related guides

- DPIPWE (2009) Guidelines for Quarantine and Biosecurity and Plant Health staff involved in responses to potential Plant Quarantine Pests in Tasmania. Prepared by Biosecurity & Plant Health Branch.
- DPIPWE (2009) Guidelines for Quarantine and Biosecurity and Plant Health Branch staff in relation to pest identification at the barrier. Prepared by Biosecurity and Plant Health Branch.

Both these documents are filed as DocONE S002001

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