

Press release: Horticulture industry urged to be vigilant for signs of tree pest

Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) caterpillars found on trees recently imported from the Netherlands.



Woodland managers, land owners, the forest industry and tree nurseries are being urged to remain vigilant after the Plant Health Service intercepted a finding of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) caterpillars on trees recently imported from the Netherlands.

Swift action is being taken to eradicate this finding in Hampshire, including surveillance and tracing work. However, the case highlights the need for continued vigilance to protect the UK's trees and forests against pests and diseases.

OPM is an established pest in parts of London and surrounding areas, but the rest of the country is designated as a Protected Zone (PZ).

OPM caterpillars feed on oak leaves and can increase trees' vulnerability to attack by other pests and diseases, making them less able to withstand adverse weather conditions such as drought and floods.

Professor Nicola Spence, Defra Chief Plant Health Officer, said:

Since 2012 we have invested more than £37 million in tree health research, including a dedicated programme of research and development on oak.

We are working with local authorities and land managers to tackle OPM with a control programme of treatment and surveillance and in 2018 we introduced tighter restrictions on the importation of oak

trees to England.

Dr Anna Brown, Head of Tree Health & Contingency Planning, Forestry Commission, said:

Those of us involved in importing or trading plants must maintain our vigilance against exotic pests and diseases such as OPM. There is a lot we can do such as buying British, only buying stock from reputable, responsible suppliers and inspecting imported plants.

Inspect, inspect and inspect again – we can't check imported plants too often for signs of trouble. Don't presume that because your supplier found no evidence of a pest or disease that you won't either. You might spot something that they have missed.

The Forestry Commission, councils and land managers tackle the pest with an annual control programme of tree treatment.

[Increased measures to protect the country from the spread of OPM were introduced in 2018](#). Restrictions on the import of most species of oak into England have been introduced as part of these regulations to protect native trees.

If you suspect OPM, you should not attempt to destroy or move infected material yourself as the nests and caterpillars can pose some risks to human health. [Visit the Forest Research website](#) for more information on how to identify OPM.

To report sightings of pests and diseases, use [the TreeAlert online portal](#).