

Strict controls on pine and cedar tree imports into Great Britain implemented

Emergency legislation restricting the movement of pine and cedar trees into Great Britain to help protect against the imminent threat of the tree pest Pine Processionary Moth has been announced today (Thursday 28 April).

Pine Processionary Moth is present in North Africa and Southern Europe, in particular in Italy. It has also recently been spreading northwards through France. As a result of this legislation, it will no longer be possible to import pine and cedar trees grown in countries where Pine Processionary Moth is established, such as Italy and France. Exceptions apply in cases where Pest Free Areas are designated, or where the trees have been grown under complete physical protection for their lifetime.

The new regulation, in the form of a Statutory Instrument, will strengthen requirements for the import of pine and cedar trees into Great Britain from Friday 29 April. The bolstered measures will only permit imports of these species, both of which are host species of Pine Processionary Moth, from:

- Countries officially confirmed by the National Plant Protection Organisation as free of Pine Processionary Moth;
- Officially designated pest-free areas;
- Nurseries where the trees have been grown under complete physical protection for their lifetime.

The controls apply to all businesses which import living plants and their constituent parts, including live plant foliage and plants for planting, into Great Britain. The restrictions do not apply to processed plant products, such as timber, wood chips and packaging materials.

This action comes following the confirmed interception of Pine Processionary Moth on a small number of pine trees at tree nurseries in England and Wales, imported from France in February this year. Pine Processionary Moth larvae and caterpillars can cause significant damage to pine and other conifer tree species, and pose a risk to human and animal health.

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

We have taken authoritative and immediate action to protect tree nurseries and the wider natural environment from the imminent threat of Pine Processionary Moth.

The increasingly globalised plant trade, along with climate change, continue to present new and emerging risks from pests and diseases. Strengthening our rigorous standards of biosecurity – already among the highest in Europe – will both minimise the net potential losses to our existing treescapes and serve to realise our long-term vision for the nation's trees and woodlands.

Across Great Britain, rapid and robust plant health enforcement action has taken place to prevent the spread of Pine Processionary Moth into the wider environment. The infested trees at the affected nurseries were swiftly contained and destroyed, whilst tracing work to identify other consignments that may be affected is ongoing. Although there is no evidence of pest spread into the environment, increased surveillance and pheromone trapping will be carried out over the summer as a precautionary monitoring measure.

Healthy trees and plants benefit people, the environment, and the economy. Protecting the long-term welfare of our treescapes will underpin Government efforts to treble tree planting rates by the end of this Parliament and plant 30,000 hectares of trees across the UK per year by 2025, as well as form part of wider efforts to achieve Net Zero by 2050.