

# Arboricultural Association

## takes a lead on biosecurity.

There has been much written in these columns and others about the threats facing our tree population from imported pests and/or disease. There is already a real awareness of those which have arrived in the UK in recent years and it is unnecessary to list or describe them again here.

The latest guidance from the Animal and Plant Health Agency lists plane wilt, chestnut blight, pine processionary moth, elm yellows, bacterial shot hole of laurel and *Xylella fastidiosa* as being threats not currently in the UK. Imports of plane, oak, sweet chestnut, pine, ash (currently prohibited), elm and *prunus* have to be notified to the agency for possible inspection even if trees are to be delivered directly to planting site. It stresses that there is a risk of infecting UK populations and that it is breaking the law not to notify APHA of imports of these species and that there is a risk of prosecution for failure to comply.

There has been parliamentary discussion of the threat posed by imported pests and disease, with Lord Framlingham playing a prominent role, and continuous ongoing lobbying of MPs and others.

Yet there has been a remarkable silence from representative organisations from within the industry, until now. The Arboricultural Association, taking a lead, has published a position statement entitled *Biosecurity in Arboriculture and Urban Forestry*. This is reproduced in full on the pages opposite.

What gives the statement a somewhat unique status is the number of other organisations that have endorsed it.

I list these below:

- Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
- The Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA)
- The Forestry Commission
- The Institute of Chartered Foresters
- The National Association of Tree Officers
- The London Tree Officers Association
- The Society of Garden Designers
- The Trees and Design Action Group
- The Landscape Institute
- The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew
- The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh
- Trees for Cities
- Fund for Trees
- The Royal Horticultural Society.

This list of endorsees is being added to continuously.

So, with the Arboricultural Association taking the lead, a significant number of organisations have made a commitment to certain biosecurity practices outlined in the statement.

However, it is one thing professional and other bodies subscribing to a document, but another to ensure that the intentions of the document are translated into action on the ground where there can be significant and real effects.

Questions can be posed such as:

- Will landscape architects continue to specify and order large trees for immediate planting in the UK landscape from mainland Europe?
- Will some tree nurseries continue to ship in trees from the continent, load them from one lorry to another and despatch for planting in the UK landscape?
- Will procurement policies of local authorities take into account biosecurity?
- Will garden designs feature more home-grown trees?
- Will contractors continue to buy cheaply from abroad?
- Will all those involved in the management and maintenance of trees revise and review their hygiene practices?  
and
- Will the RHS review the number of imported trees and other material brought in from the continent to facilitate short-term prestige events such as the Chelsea Flower Show?

The answer is, of course, that it is unlikely, but the Arboricultural Association statement lays down a marker. The number of endorsements suggests that the marker is a welcome one which can be easily subscribed to.

However, it remains the case that individual responsibility cannot be avoided.

Each one of us makes daily decisions with regard to operational practices and procurement policies. Each one of us takes actions which can affect biosecurity either positively or negatively. Organisations can take a lead but it is individuals who decide to follow or not.

It remains true that oak processionary moth was introduced into the UK on a single oak tree, shipped in from the continent and planted directly into the UK landscape. The pest is now out, with outbreaks in other areas of London and surrounding areas. Somewhere, there is a landscape architect, contractor or some other individual who was directly responsible for importing the single oak tree. They know who they are, I guess – I don't, but the relevant question surely is whether, as an individual, you want to be responsible for the next outbreak, whatever it is.

On a recent study tour to Italy, to study the symptoms and implications of plane wilt, it was revealed that the most likely way for the disease to arrive in the UK was the transmission of infected sawdust on chainsaws which had not been cleaned thoroughly. As always, it is a question of operational hygiene, but also a question of individual responsibility – which cannot be avoided.

So, the Arboricultural Association has stepped out from the crowd and taken a lead. Others have endorsed that lead and the resultant statement which is now in the public domain.

Now we must ensure action.

Keith Sacre

## Biosecurity in Arboriculture and Urban Forestry Position Statement

The Arboricultural Association is committed to promoting the implementation and understanding of good biosecurity practices to assist in safeguarding the future of our trees from the introduction and spread of harmful organisms.

This statement outlines some basic biosecurity principles that should be adopted to reduce the unwanted introduction and spread of tree pests, diseases and invasive tree species:

- Operatives and organisations undertaking work on or around trees should consider the reasonably foreseeable consequences of their activities. Adopting **biosecurity risk assessment** processes and **policy commitments** are prudent first steps.
- Those undertaking work on or around trees have a responsibility to implement routine **biosecurity control measures** for all sites and specific measures for higher risk sites highlighted by the biosecurity risk assessment process. This should include the cleaning and disinfection of clothing, PPE, tools, equipment and vehicles.
- Arboricultural operations such as pruning, felling and planting should be planned, managed and supervised to minimise the movement of arisings and soil. All arisings must be **appropriately disposed of**.
- Organisations working on sites with trees should ensure that their operatives understand biosecurity issues and comply to adopted biosecurity measures. **Training, guidance and supervision** should be provided when necessary.
- Anyone planning, designing, or implementing planting projects should aspire to source **home grown** and nursed specimens avoiding, where possible, directly imported stock to reduce the risk of introduction of pests and diseases.
- Anyone responsible for tree supply should ensure that trees and associated soil are supplied to customers **free of pest and disease** at all points in the supply chain. Consideration must be given to the latency period\* and life cycles of all pests and diseases in order to achieve this. Special attention must be given to imported stock.
- Good urban forestry practice involves managing tree populations to **increase species and genetic diversity** by focusing on the establishment and maintenance of trees with qualities suited to the site and the prevailing climatic conditions. Additionally, good species composition, age structure, stock quality and condition will help reduce the future loss of trees due to the introduction, hybridisation or spread of tree pests and diseases.
- Anyone involved with trees must encourage and promote adherence to these guiding principles and above all **act as role models** in this regard.

\* A period of time where a plant may be infected or infested by a particular pest or disease but where there are no physical symptoms that indicate ill health.

If you are unsure about any of these guiding principles **do not ignore them**. More information and guidance can be found from the following sources:

Arboricultural Association  
[www.trees.org.uk](http://www.trees.org.uk)

Forestry Commission England  
[www.forestry.gov.uk/england-keepitclean](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-keepitclean)

These principles are supported by the following organisations

