highways england

INFORMATION

Safety Alert

Giant Hogweed

12/06/2019

Background information

Giant Hogweed is an invasive weed species notifiable under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) section 14 schedule 9. The weed is a perennial that takes up to 4 years to flower after which it dies, it can grow up to 5m tall and disperses up to 50,000 seeds per year. The weed thrives where soil has been disrupted such as river banks, derelict land or railway embankments.

Effect upon human activity:

- The plants sap is poisonous which is released when the plant is handled.
- If the sap comes into contact with the skin it can make the skin more sensitive to UV rays. Once exposed to the sun again this can cause a mild rash to painful watery blisters that are slow to heal.
- In severe cases hospital treatment may be needed and occasionally contact precipitates a recurring dermatitis.
- Contact with eyes can cause temporary blindness & hospital treatment must be sought.

Effects on existing habitats:

- As it spreads it will endanger the survival of native species.
- Loss of other vegetation can lead to soil erosion when the Giant Hogweed dies back in the winter.
- The plant can harm grazers and impair their appetites.

Action for all employees:

- Care should be taken to avoid skin contact with the sap.
- All planned works should avoid contact with the plants.
- Works near to the identified plants should only commence with the appropriate precautions:
  - Wear goggles to protect the eyes.
  - Wear gloves, long trousers and long sleeved shirts with cuffs buttoned.
- In the event of accidental exposure:
  - Wash the area immediately and dispose of any contaminated PPE.
  - Cover the skin to prevent exposure to sun-light.
  - If blisters appear prevent them from bursting to reduce the risk of infection.
  - Seek medical attention and inform the doctor you have been exposed to Giant Hogweed.

If Giant Hogweed is identified on the SRN please alert your local environment team and the OCR so treatment of the plant can be arranged.

If you have any queries about Giant Hogweed please contact your local environment team

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home safe and well