
DATE: May 17, 2010

REPORT TITLE: **GIANT HOGWEED**

FROM: Janette Smith, Commissioner of Health Services
David L. Mowat, MBChB, MPH, FRCPC, Medical Officer of Health

RECOMMENDATION

That a copy of the report of the Commissioner of Health Services and the Medical Officer of Health dated May 17, 2010 and titled "Giant Hogweed" be forwarded to the City of Brampton, City of Mississauga, Town of Caledon, Credit Valley Conservation Authority, Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, Peel District School Board and Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board to encourage continued dissemination of information to the public.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Giant hogweed, an invasive plant which may be hazardous, has been found in all three area municipalities in Peel.
- Exposure to the plant's sap can cause skin blisters, burns and scarring.
- Sap in the eyes can cause temporary or permanent blindness.
- The area municipalities and conservation authorities are involved in a number of actions to educate the public and control the spread of giant hogweed.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

Giant hogweed, an invasive plant species which may be hazardous, has been found in all three area municipalities in Peel. The clear and watery sap of giant hogweed is found in the stem and hairs of hogweed plants. Contact with giant hogweed sap can cause skin to become hypersensitive to the ultraviolet portion of sunlight. This can occur up to 48 hours after exposure and result in painful burns and blisters. The blisters may lead to purple or black scars that last for some time. Giant hogweed sap in the eyes can also cause temporary and sometimes permanent blindness.

Giant hogweed looks similar to cow parsnip. The plant can reach a height of approximately 15 to 20 feet and has hollow stems with dark reddish-purple splotches and coarse white hair. The leaves of the plant can grow up to five feet in width and have hairs on the underside. The plant also produces flattened, oval shaped fruit and in the summer small white flowers form. A photograph of giant hogweed can be found in Appendix I.

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Giant hogweed has been found in Ontario and British Columbia. The plants thrive in many habitats, but do well on wastelands, riverbanks, and alongside roads and railroads. The plant can also be found on or near residential properties.

2. Actions on Giant Hogweed

a) Region of Peel

The Region of Peel's website (<http://www.peelregion.ca/health/topics/injury/giant-hogweed.htm>) provides information on giant hogweed including photographs, the health risks of coming in contact with the plant, first aid measures, and how to safely remove the plant. Information was also sent to Peel health care providers on July 22, 2009 through a Health Professionals Update. Peel Public Health staff have also provided information to the public through media interviews, and information about the plant has been integrated into training programs for staff who work outdoors.

b) City of Brampton

Giant hogweed found on public property will be sprayed with glyphosate (Roundup). If residents believe they have giant hogweed on their property, City staff will visit the property to determine if the plant in question is giant hogweed. If giant hogweed is confirmed, City staff will remove the plant at no cost to the home owner.

c) City of Mississauga

If giant hogweed plants are found adjacent to public property they will be removed by City staff. Signage is also being developed to warn residents of areas where giant hogweed has been found, and information for the City's website is currently being finalized.

d) Town of Caledon

An Integrated Pest Management-accredited contractor has been retained to spray giant hogweed found on road allowances. Concerns about giant hogweed on private property are referred to the by-law enforcement section of the Town of Caledon for advice on safe removal and disposal of plants or issuance of an order under the property standards by-law. Town staff placed a notice in the April 29, 2010 edition of the Caledon Enterprise reminding residents of the dangers of giant hogweed.

e) Credit Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA)

CVCA staff remove giant hogweed found on conservation lands. CVCA staff are also working with local area municipalities to provide support and education on giant hogweed. Brochures and fact sheets on invasive species include information about giant hogweed. The CVCA will also provide land owners with information on identification and best practices for removal of giant hogweed on request.

f) Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA)

TRCA staff remove giant hogweed plants found on conservation lands. TRCA staff also provide support to municipalities on strategies to deal with the giant hogweed issue.

CVCA and TRCA staff participate on the Ontario Invasive Plant Council. The area municipalities are also represented on the Council by the City of Toronto, who is an interim board member of the Council. The Ontario Invasive Plant Council, in partnership with the Invasive Plant Council of British Columbia, has advocated to the Canadian Food Inspection Agency that giant hogweed be regulated as a pest. The Council has also submitted a funding application to the Sault Ste Marie Invasive Species Institute to develop best management practices for giant hogweed. The area municipalities and

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conservation authorities are involved in a number of actions to educate the public and control the spread of giant hogweed.

CONCLUSION

Giant hogweed is an invasive plant that poses a risk to human health. On-going measures to control the spread of giant hogweed, warn residents of areas where giant hogweed plants have been found, and to inform residents of the risks of exposure to giant hogweed are needed.




Janette Smith
Commissioner of Health Services



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Approved for Submission:



D. Szwarc, Chief Administrative Officer

For further information regarding this report, please contact Paul Callanan, Director, Environmental Health at extension 2802 or via email at paul.callanan@peelregion.ca.

c. Legislative Services

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APPENDIX I

