PLANT AND ENVIRONMENT INVESTIGATION REPORT

Termites on imported goods from California

In Auckland live termite alates were found among boxes of plastic autoclave bags imported from California. The area where the imported stock was being devanned was sprayed with insecticide as a containment measure. Samples collected were identified by the Plant Health and Environment Laboratory as the western drywood termite *Incisitermes minor*. A site inspection found multiple pairs of live de-winged alates attempting to establish nests in the corrugations of the cardboard boxes. The pallet and boxes containing the termites were frozen to kill any animals that might have escaped notice. As a precaution, the container and all other boxes in the same shipment from California from the same supplier were fumigated with methyl bromide. No further termites were found during a trace back of items inside the container delivered to other locations.

Black widow spiders on boat ex United States

A mechanic servicing an imported boat and trailer found three spider nests in cavities formed when the wheel rim was fitted to the axle hub. The nests comprised webbing and old egg sacs. One of the nests contained a live spider with markings consistent with a black widow. A MAF investigator collected the specimen from the Christchurch workshop and examined the trailer and boat, confirming that the nests would have been hidden from view during inspections but the boat and trailer appeared otherwise clean. Lab identification the same day confirmed the spider as the venomous *Latrodectus hesperus*, the western black widow, in sufficient time to allow a pest control agent to visit the site that day and treat the trailer, boat and surrounding area. Meanwhile the importer was contacted and two more boat/trailer units were identified from the same import consignment. These were also treated to address any similar risk of spider presence.

Ash leaf psyllid in Wellington

A Wellington arborist reported ash trees (*Fraxinus* spp.) with wilting, premature leaf drop and decline in the Lower Hutt area. The arborist was concerned it was ash whitefly, which was detected in Auckland in 1995. The specimens submitted were identified as psyllids, *Psyllopsis fraxinicola* (Hemiptera: Psyllidae), commonly known as jumping plant lice. They are generally small (2–3 mm) and host-specific. Psyllid nymph feeding can cause considerable damage to the host plant. This is the first record of this psyllid in the North Island. Hutt City Council may investigate control options. This European species was first identified from ash (*Fraxinus* spp.) in Christchurch by A. Healy in 1963. It is widespread in Britain and recently introduced to North and South America and Australia.

MAF's Investigation and Diagnostic Centres & Response directorate (IDC & R) is accountable for the investigation and diagnosis of suspect exotic pests and diseases. In the plant and environment sectors IDC has investigators and scientists based in Auckland and Christchurch. The IDC & R provides field investigation, diagnostic testing and technical expertise with regard to new pests and diseases affecting plants and the environment. The IDC & R also conducts surveillance and response functions, and research and development to support surveillance and incursion response activities.

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