Environmental Guidance Note 1

24th July 2014

Identifying Invasive & Injurious Plants

Whilst we enjoy the warm and dry weather at the height of summer, this time of year sees the rapid growth and spread of invasive and injurious weeds.

Exposure to injurious weeds can cause severe skin irritation and burns, especially when combined with direct sunlight and it is illegal to allow the spread of invasive weeds.

This note provides guidance on how to identify the following invasive and injurious weeds which are common to the rail environment to help you to avoid coming into contact with the plants or allowing your worksite activities cause their spread:

- Japanese Knotweed
- Giant Hogweed
- Himalayan Balsam
- Ragwort
- Wild Parsnip, and,
- Oak Processsionary Moths

Full PPE should be worn during site walkovers; do not touch any plants that are potentially invasive or injurious.

If any doubt take a photo of the plant from a safe distance and send it to a member of the **Safety & Sustainable Development Team** to assist with its identification.

Where Invasive Plant Species are identified the details should be entered into the Hazard Directory, this will flag up the risk when future works are planned at a certain location.

You should seek medical attention if you come into contact with an injurious species, the incident should also be logged with NSC.

everyone
home safe
every day

Species	Characteristics	Risks & Controls
Japanese Knotweed   	Japanese knotweed: • produces fleshy red tinged shoots when it first breaks through the ground • has large, heart or spade-shaped green leaves • has a hollow stem, like bamboo • can form dense clumps that can be several metres deep • can grow as much as 20 cm per day reaching a height of 3 m by June • produces clusters of cream flowers towards the end of July • dies back between September and November, leaving brown stems	It is illegal to cause Japanese Knotweed to spread under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) so plans must be made to prevent any soil or contaminated water spreading offsite Management of Japanese Knotweed is highly costly and time-consuming therefore poses a risk to projects if not identified early Japanese Knotweed and the soil surrounding it is classified as controlled waste under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and must be disposed of as such under licence or exemption.
Giant Hogweed 	Giant hogweed: • has a reddish purple stem with fine spines that make it appear furry - like a stinging nettle • has hollow stems • has spotted leaf stalks • has leaves up to 1.5 m wide • flowers in June and July • has flower heads that are usually 50 cm wide	You should take great care when identifying giant hogweed. When its sap comes into contact with skin, it reacts with sunlight and causes chemical skin burns. Giant hogweed sap becomes more toxic as the year progresses and the plant is exposed to more sunlight. If you get sap on your skin, cover it to keep it out of the sun. Go indoors immediately and wash the sap off your skin with soap and lots of water.

Species	Characteristics	Risks & Controls
Himalayan balsam 	Himalayan balsam is often found on river banks, growing up to 2 m in height. Each plant lasts for one year and dies at the end of the growing season. Himalayan balsam: • has reddish coloured stems • has dark green, lance-shaped leaves with jagged edges • flowers from June to October • has large, brightly coloured flowers that are usually in variable shades from purple to pale pink • can produce around 2,500 seeds per plant each year • has explosive seed pods that can throw seeds over 6 metres away from the plant	Himalayan Balsam forms dense stands which suppress the growth of grasses and native British plants.
Ragwort  Young plant  Adult plant	**Young plant:** • grows from the autumn to early June as a circular cluster of leaves often described as rosettes • leaves are usually a deep bottle-green, tinged purple, and slightly glossy on the upper surface. **Adult plant:** • produce flowering stems from late June onwards • stems are between 30-100cm tall • carry dense flat topped clusters of bright yellow daisy-like flower heads each 1.5 to 2.5cm wide • leaves on mature plants are strongly divided into narrow lobes with the bases clasping the non-woody main stem • flowering stems die back after producing seeds.	Ragwort contains chemicals which are poisonous to most animals; if eaten in sufficient quantities it can cause death. It is particularly important to prevent ragwort spreading to neighbouring agricultural land or livery yards.

Species	Characteristics	Risks & Controls
Wild parsnip 	**Wild parsnip:** • erect stems 50-150cm tall • flowers from late June into late autumn • small yellow flowers which are clustered in 10-20cm wide 'umbrellas'	This plant, when cut or disturbed, produces a toxic juice. If the juice contacts the skin and reacts with sunlight, it can cause severe r ashes and burns. If you get sap on your skin, cover it to keep it out of the sun. Go indoors immediately and wash the sap off your skin with soap and lots of water
Oak processionary moth caterpillars 	• Most easily recognised by their distinctive habit of moving about in late spring and early summer in nose-to-tail processions and the fact that they almost exclusively live in feed on oak trees • the adult moth is an indistinctive; a brown moth very similar in appearance to other, harmless species • active from mid to late summer and lay their eggs on the smaller twigs and branches in oak trees	The hairs of these caterpillars bear a protein which can cause itchy skin rashes, eye and throat irritations, and in some cases breathing difficulty breathing in people and animals.