RAGWORT POLICY & ADVICE NOTE

How to identify common Ragwort?

Flowering stems are produced from late June onwards. These are between 30 -100cm tall carrying dense flat-topped clusters of bright yellow daisy like flower heads each 1.5 - 2.5cm across. The leaves on the mature plants are divided into narrow lobes with the bases clasping to the non-woody main stem. The flowering stems die back after producing seeds, each plant being capable of producing up to 150,000 seeds.

Why should Dorset County Council be concerned about Ragwort?

The DEFRA Code of Practice (2003) on how to prevent the spread of Common Ragwort aims to define the situations where there is a likelihood of Common Ragwort spreading to neighbouring land where it will present an identifiable risk of ingestion by vulnerable grazing animals.

Under the Weeds Act 1959 the occupier of land (i.e. Dorset County Council owned land) should take action to prevent the spread of Common Ragwort.

The Code does not seek to eradicate our native Common Ragwort, as it is a very important plant for wildlife in the UK, supporting a wide variety of invertebrates and is also a major source of nectar for many insects. Instead it aims to prevent the spread of Ragwort to areas that pose a high risk of poisoning to livestock in fields or areas used for the production of forage.

Assessment of Risks

Where Common Ragwort is present on land owned by Dorset County Council, an assessment[1] will be made by Dorset Works Organisation (DWO) to determine whether action should be taken to prevent the spread onto neighbouring land by establishing the risk posed to animals or forage production. Three categories are used to assess risk, these are:

High Risk - Common Ragwort is present and flowering/seeding within 50m of land used for grazing by horses or land used for forage production.

Medium Risk - Common Ragwort is present within 50 - 100m.

Low Risk - Common Ragwort or the land infected is more than 100m from land used for grazing by horses or land used for forage production is present.

However these distances are only guidelines when assessing the risk, as prevailing winds and topography can affect the likelihood of it spreading to neighbouring land.

Action

Action will only be taken where Dorset County Council has identified a high risk of spread. They will put in place and implement their Ragwort Control Policy to take into account vegetation management, nature conservation status and biodiversity attributes of the land. The Natural Environment Team will be consulted prior to any action on all designated habitats, e.g. SSSI, SNCI or DWT Conservation Verges. Immediate action to control the spread will be taken using appropriate control measures. The affected land will remain on the treatment programme until the infestation level drops to low risk. Where ragwort is becoming a persistent problem in high risk areas consideration may be given to managing the habitat by planting it up with native trees and shrub species that will reduce the amount of ragwort by eventually shading it out (in conjunction with the NET). Where medium or low risk of

[1] Identification and Assessment procedures for Common Ragwort - Appendix 1.

spread has been identified no action will be taken.

Control

Once a decision has been made as to the type of action required, the following methods can be used to control the spread of Ragwort;

Spraying – This is the preferred option, as it is both effective and cost efficient as it avoids the need to handle and dispose of any plant material after control. Spraying should be done in April or May prior to the flowering stage using a glysophate-based weed killer and appropriate spraying equipment for the area to be treated.

Other forms of treatment include cutting and levering and pulling. These will only be used in exceptional cases, e.g. on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or DWT Conservation Verges, where spraying could harm significantly important vegetation.

Cutting - Emergency treatment to prevent seeding, it is essential to cut before seed heads are mature as up to 150,000 seeds can be produced from one plant. All cut material will be disposed of correctly as seed can still be set and foliage continue to cause a danger to animals and it will be removed from the area. Gloves must be worn.

Levering and pulling - Loosen and dig/pull up plants before seed heads mature, best results are obtained when soil is moist, all material will be removed as above. Pulling alone can cause the plant to break off, and leave the rosette in the ground ready to grow again. Gloves must be worn. Probably one of the best controls but very labour intensive. All material removed will sealed in plastic bags for landfill or proper incineration (improper burning can spread the seed). Transporting pulled Ragwort will be in a sealed container or well covered to prevent the spread of any seed.

Where can I get further help and advice?

Advice on Ragwort and help on the control and eradication of Ragwort can be sought from the DEFRA website http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/wildlife/weeds/index.htm The reporting of Ragwort locations and technical advice on its control can be made to Dorset County Council on: 01305 221000 or using the report form on http://highways.dorsetforyou.com/pem/.

DEFRA will only take enforcement action under the Weeds Act 1959 where Common Ragwort poses a high risk to horses and production of forage. Where a problem is identified, contact should be initially made with Dorset County Council (where they are the land owner) to resolve the matter informally. It is hoped that collaboration and cooperation with neighbours will help to achieve effective control of the spread of Common Ragwort in Dorset.

We would like to acknowledge Kirklees Council in the production of this document.

Appendix 1

Identification and Assessment Procedure for identifying and controlling Common Ragwort Steve Harris – Grounds Services Manager

For 2009:

1. Any operative working for DCC/DWO, any reports received through HOLE (Highways on-line Enquiry), or Public Enquiry Manager (PEM) indicating Common Ragwort risk will be investigated by DCC/DWO to assess category (high, medium or low).

2. DCC/DWO use data gathered (2008) from their weed control contractor for A & B roads to formulate a costed chemical treatment programme for high risk areas.

3. Data gathered from weed control contractor will be cross-checked against the Dorset Environmental Records Centre (DERC) Environmental Layer available on Dorset Explorer (e.g. designated/sensitive areas).

4. A botanical expert from DERC will survey highly protected areas of Dorset (i.e. Purbeck) to ascertain presence of Common Ragwort in relation to other commonly mistaken look-alikes, e.g. Hoary Ragwort, Tansyfoot, etc. This data will be used to amend Common Ragwort database and recommendations will be made for control of Common Ragwort in these sensitive areas, i.e. areas adjacent to SSSIs, SNCIs, Conservation Road Verges, etc.

5. DCC/DWO use data (2007/2008) to help develop a C & D road programme. Also cross-check with the A & B programme.

6. DCC/DWO use new 2009 PEM data to modify and develop a programme for all four road classifications.

7. With reference to current PEM vegetation management chart (11.2008) Area Office Highway staff (and DEC staff) will investigate new sightings of Common Ragwort and decide on priority status (high, medium or low). The new Highways Inspections Manual version 4 Oct 2008 refers to this in the summary of miscellaneous defects.

8. All data on Ragwort gathered by Highways will be sent to DERC for inclusion onto their database. The data collected from 2008 on A & B roads in Purbeck and on all roads for 2009 will be used to formulate the Ragwort Control programme for 2010 (and so on).

9. As sites change from high to low risk overtime, they would be taken off the Ragwort database.