

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** All Staff

**DATE:** August 16, 2010

**FROM:** Gerry Mitchell, Director for Health and Safety

**SUBJECT:** Giant Hogweed

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You may have recently heard news reports on the hazards of coming in contact with Giant Hogweed plants. I have attached a fact sheet from the Grand River Conservation Authority which summarizes the concern with coming in contact with the sap from the Giant Hogweed plant. The sap will cause sensitivity to sunlight and could lead to burns and blistering.

As noted in the article, the simplest thing to do is to avoid the plant altogether. Therefore, it is critical to be able to recognize the plant. The attached article shows photos of the plant but you may need to go to one of the websites noted at the end of the attached article for clearer photos.

For all staff who may be working in fields etc. please ensure you stay clear of these plants. You should also warn family/friends of this issue (particularly children) since these plants frequently occur in recreational areas.

## GIANT HOGWEED (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) FACT SHEET

### Habitat:

Giant Hogweed is a herbaceous non-native plant originating in Asia. It prefers moist, disturbed soil and partially shaded areas. Hogweed can be found near wastelands, riverbanks, ravines and along railroads of northeastern US and southern Ontario.

### Identification:

Giant Hogweed is most easily identified by its massive size. The plant can reach heights of 10 to 15 ft. The large hollow stem is 2 to 4 inches in diameter with ridges, dark reddish purple spots and white bristles. The compound leaves have 3 deeply incised leaflets and can grow up to 5 ft wide. Hogweed is also easily recognized by the numerous white flat-topped flowers clustered in an umbrella shaped head that can grow up to 2.5 ft wide. It flowers in June and July.



A) Hogweed Stem



B) Deeply incised leaves



C) Umbrella shaped flower head



D) Entire Giant Hogweed plant

### Symptoms:

The clear, watery sap of Giant Hogweed contains toxins known as furocoumarins that can cause skin to become temporarily but severely sensitive to sunlight (photo-dermatitis). These toxins can be injected into the skin through contact with the white bristly hairs found along the stem. Skin contact, followed by

exposure to sunlight produces painful burning blisters and swelling that can develop into purplish or blackened scars within 24-48 hours of contact, and in some acute cases, lead to death. Contact with eyes can cause temporary or sometimes permanent blindness. Damaged skin will heal very slowly, as these scars can persist for several years.

#### **Treatment:**

If you come into contact with Giant Hogweed, keep out of direct sunlight and immediately wash the affected areas with soap and water. Avoid sunlight for approximately 1 week afterwards to prevent blistering and scarring. If a skin reaction occurs, treating it with topical steroids early on can reduce the severity of blistering and ease discomfort. If you have been extensively exposed to the sap of this plant, seek medical advice immediately.

#### **Prevention:**

The best way to prevent a reaction to Giant Hogweed is to be able to identify the plant and avoid contact (see table below for a summary of plants similar to Hogweed). Do not cultivate, plant, purchase or transplant this species as it is very difficult to control and may result in your skin coming into contact with the sap. If you must go near it, protective clothing must be worn to prevent contact, as the hairs can penetrate regular fabrics. Wear long, canvas-style pants and long sleeves, or a disposable rain suit, thick rubber gloves, and safety glasses to prevent sap penetration.

#### **Summary of key identification features of plant similar to Giant Hogweed**

	<b>Giant Hogweed</b>	<b>Cow Parsnip</b>	<b>Angelica</b>	<b>Queen Anne's Lace</b>	<b>Water Hemlock</b>
	<i>Heracleum mantegazzianum</i>	<i>Heracleum maximum</i>	<i>Angelica atropurpurea</i>	<i>Daucus carota</i>	<i>Cicuta maculata</i>
<b>Height</b>	10-15 ft	6 ft	8 ft	3-4 ft	4-6 ft
<b>Flower</b>	White, flat, very large, up to 2 ft in diameter	White, flat, 6-10 in. clusters	White, round, less than 1ft in diameter	White, flat, small flower heads	White, half round, 2-8 in.
<b>Leaf</b>	Lobed, broad, up to 5 ft across	Lobed and toothed, in 3 segments, up to 1 ft across	Double compound leaf	Feathery and finely divided	Double compound leaf
<b>Stem</b>	Thick with coarse hairs, blistering purple spots	Thick with fine hairs, grooved, mostly green	Smooth, dark purple	Thin, erect with short coarse hairs	Smooth, purple
<b>Flowering Season</b>	June - July	June - August	June - September	June - September	July - September

#### **For more information, check out these websites:**

<http://massnrc.org/pests/pestFAQsheets/hogweed.html>

<http://www.cce.cornell.edu/allegany-cattaraugus/hort/PestAlert.htm>

<http://invasives.uconn.edu/ipane/ipanespecies/hogweed.htm>

<http://www.invasive.org/browse/subject.cfm?sub=4536>