



Informational Bulletin

Hogweed Identified in Clarke County

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Approved By: Darren L. Stevens, Fire Rescue Chief

This Bulletin is to inform you as a responder about the recent sighting of an invasive plant identified by the Massey Herbarium Virginia Polytech Institute and State University. The Plant Species identified in Clarke County is known as the Giant Hogweed Plant or Cow Parsnip, native to Asia this plant can be dangerous to humans who unexpectedly come in contact with it. The leaves can be up to five feet across and the stem, which contains a toxic sap, is hollow and rigid, and has purple blotches and coarse white hairs near its base.



Photo Courtesy of VT Massey Herbarium

The Massey Herbarium at Virginia Tech has most recently confirmed the location of 30 plants in Clarke County. The Virginia Tech group posted photos of the plant on Facebook, urging anyone who comes across a giant hogweed plant to report it and be careful not to touch it.

The giant Hogweed plant's sap contains toxic chemicals known as photosensitizing furanocoumarins. When these chemicals come into contact with human skin, it can cause a reaction that makes skin extremely sensitive to light. The reaction also causes dark, painful blisters, which can leave scars. Touching giant hogweed can also lead to long-term sunlight sensitivity, and blindness if sap gets into a person's eyes.

The New York State Department of Health recommended that anyone who came in contact with the plant wash it off with cold water immediately and get out of the sun. A toxic reaction can begin as soon as 15 minutes after contact. If the plant's sap has made contact with your eyes flush eyes immediately and apply sun glasses and seek medical attention. The sap is harmful due to its ability to make skin extremely sensitive to ultraviolet light which in some cases has caused full thickness burns.

The purpose of this bulletin is to make you as the provider aware of a safety concern when engaged in wildland firefighting operations and a possible differential diagnosis to dermatological emergencies such as chemical burns.

The photo below is courtesy of The British Ass. Of Plastic and Aesthetic Surgeons. *A 10 year old male full thickness burn from exposure to Hogweed requiring surgical debridement.*



Citations

Chan, Jeffery CY. JPRAS Journal on Surgical reconstruction (January 2011 Volume 64 issue 1)

“Full thickness burn caused by exposure to giant hogweed: Delayed presentation, histological features and surgical management” <https://www.jprasurg.com/action/showFullTextImages?pii=S1748-6815%2810%2900171-3>

Okane, Kaitlin. CBS News (June 18, 2018)

“Giant Hogweed plant that causes blindness and third degree burns discovered in Virginia”

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/giant-hogweed-plant-causes-blindness-third-degree-burns-discovered-in-virginia-other-states/>

Questions regarding this bulletin should be directed to Technician Matthew Shields.