

ROGUE TRADERS CASH IN ON CHALARA CONFUSION

Reports from South East England suggest unscrupulous operators masquerading as professional arborists and tree surgeons are scaring landowners into felling perfectly safe and healthy common ash trees. They are preying on already considerable fears generated by the national media storm over chalara ash dieback at the end of last year. Kent Trading Standards is the latest to warn on this development.

The national media storm appears to have abated for now, but some landowners with ash trees on their properties clearly do not require much persuasion to err on the side of caution as they see it.

Current information from DEFRA says no-one will be forced to destroy ash trees unless they are young trees which are part of a recently planted site identified with chalara ash dieback disease. In these situations the Forestry Commission or another branch of the UK plant health authority will issue a Plant Health Notice. This effectively means that all mature ash trees could (for the moment) be spared. However, this does not take into account any developing issues with public safety which landowners (tree owners) are clearly responsible for.

Such a threat to perfectly healthy fully grown ash trees

from 'cowboy' operators shows the urgent need for FC and FERA to introduce the microinjection of systemic fungicide as a means of ash tree protection, so at least landowners have the option of protecting trees rather than pre-emptively felling them.

Finding a solution should not prove too difficult. North Americans have to deal with a potentially lethal disease of oak trees called oak wilt caused by a close relative of Chalara fraxinea (chalara ash dieback). Oak wilt is caused by a fungus called Chalara quercina. Oak trees in North America have been successfully protected (and in some cases cured) of oak wilt disease by injection of the systemic fungicide propiconazole, a member of the azole (sub group triazole) fungicides, and by mode of action described as a Steroid Demethylation (ergosterol biosynthesis) Inhibitor (DMI).

The fungicide is injected into the tree trunk by operators working at ground level and is subsequently transported to all aerial parts of the tree in the xylem (water conducting tissue). There are other different triazole fungicides including tebuconazole which are used in a similar way to protect against and control oak wilt disease.

Dr Terry Mabbett



BLOGGING WITH ROYAL APPROVAL

This month's featured blog is from Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club in Kent, which will host the 2013 Amateur Championship and is one of four venues selected for Final Open Qualifying from 2014 to 2018. The blog was started by Assistant Links superintendent James Bledge shortly after joining the Club last October. It's crammed with information and high quality pictures documenting the greenkeeping team's work including rough management, tee platform renovation, bunker revetting and all manner of winter work taking place on the course.

The Club has already seen several clear benefits from writing the blog. James says: "Take the overseeding for example, we spent a good sum of money hiring an expensive machine to do a specific task. Many golfers were asking what we were doing and why we were doing it. They were able to view the blog and get the information they required. Weeks later we were able to post a picture of the results and we are confident that a good part of the membership now understand why we do what we do."

Links Superintendent Chris Barnard added: "I think the blog was a great idea from James, it's a very useful tool for keeping members informed about current projects on the course. It helps to answer many questions before they're asked giving us more time out on the course to get through this year's very busy winter programme.

"Our members are interested in the work we do and are proud of the course. We wanted to document and share with everyone exactly what we've been doing throughout the winter ahead of what will be a very busy season. James posted a link on the BIGGA bulletin board to see if anyone else was blogging. There were loads of positive replies and it seems a few courses have started blogs as a result. The Cruden Bay and Carnoustie blogs are particularly interesting as well as a few others. Some other blogs have inspired us to possibly try adding extras like video footage. Perhaps our blog inspires other courses to start!

"We're hosting the British Amateur Championship this year and the green staff are doing a lot of work ahead of it. 2013 will be a very exciting time for everyone at Royal Cinque Ports."

Contact Steve Castle at steve.castle@bigga.co.uk if you think your blog deserves to be featured in GI.