



Media Release

The Department of Primary Industries

Friday, January 6, 2012

First detection of myrtle rust in Victoria

The destructive plant disease myrtle rust has been found in Victoria for the first time, at a retail nursery on the Mornington Peninsula.

The disease poses a threat to Victoria's nursery and forestry industries, as well as to public parks and gardens and native forests.

Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Incident Controller, Gordon Berg, said a report of suspected myrtle rust was made by nursery staff and later confirmed by DPI diagnostic tests.

"Because myrtle rust is very easily spread, it is not surprising that it has reached Victoria," Mr Berg said.

"Since the first Australian detection in New South Wales in early 2010, it has spread to far north Queensland and has been found on over 150 different plant species.

"The tiny spores of myrtle rust are easily spread on contaminated plant material, equipment, vehicles, clothing and shoes, as well as by animals, wind and water."

Mr Berg said it was not known how the disease reached Victoria but, given its current widespread distribution in New South Wales and Queensland, it will not be possible to eradicate it.

"DPI is inspecting nurseries linked to the affected outlet to determine how it arrived there and how far the disease has spread.

Mr Berg said myrtle rust posed a threat to the nursery industry mainly through trade restrictions, but its effects on plant health could also impact the forestry industry, public parks and gardens and native forests.

"Under the right conditions, it could slow regeneration of the Victoria's native forests after harvesting or bushfire and even change forest biodiversity," he said.

"DPI should be notified immediately of any plants in Victoria suspected of being infected with myrtle rust."

All members of the Myrtaceae plant family are potential hosts of myrtle rust. It attacks young, soft, actively growing leaves, shoot tips and young stems, as well as the fruits and flowers of susceptible plants.

Plants at risk include gum trees, bottlebrush, tea tree, lilly pilly, paperbark, myrtle, guava, midyim, rose apple, brush box and New Zealand Christmas bush.

Plants not in the Myrtaceae family and therefore not affected by myrtle rust include roses, fruit trees, vegetables, camellias, grevilleas, crepe myrtle and wattles.

Mr Berg said sites where myrtle rust may be found include commercial plant nurseries, public gardens, parks, streetscapes and bushland.

“The first signs of myrtle rust infection are tiny raised spots that are brown to grey, often with red-purple haloes.

“Up to 14 days after infection, the spots produce masses of distinctive yellow or orange spores.”

Reports of suspected myrtle rust can be made by calling DPI on 1800 084 881, or by emailing photos of the suspect material, together with a contact phone number and the plant’s location, to plant.protection@dpi.vic.gov.au

To avoid spreading the disease, do not touch, move or collect samples of the suspect plant.

Further information about myrtle rust can be found on the DPI website at www.dpi.vic.gov.au/myrtlerust