Myrtle Rust – Still A Notifiable Disease: Hopefully you are getting and spreading the message prevention is better than the cure!

By Michael Daniel, CNP, NID, NGINA

Myrtle rust (Giradia t Rohingj) detections in both retail garden centres and production nursery businesses in NSW continued during November – albeit at a lower level than in September and October. This is pleasing, however the overwhelming majority of these detections are from farms towards rather than businesses actively looking and reporting suspect cases to Industry & Investment NSW as should be done given Myrtle rust is a notifiable disease.

The greatest concern to all of us should be the fact Myrtle rust has been detected in native vegetation outside the nursery and garden industry within multiple areas within the Central Coast region. These sites include open public reserves, National Parks and State Forests. Subsequently these have been extensively surveyed to determine the extent of infection and sections closed to reduce the risk of further spread.

The nursery industry and associated industries must step up and adopt suitable risk management procedures to minimise the risk of becoming infected with Myrtle rust and moving the disease around. The nursery industry can assist in the management and eradication of this Emergency Plant Pest (EPP) from Australia. Yes people - we need to get our act together and do what we can to share in the responsibility of Biosecurity and protect not just ourselves but our great native bushland and wildlife we are accustomed to.

A critical element to managing Myrtle rust and for that matter any EPP outbreak is to raise the awareness of the associated industries (landscapers, cut flower growers, bush regeneration, garden maintenance) community and the general public. The commercial parties can assist by supporting the eradication plan and helping to distribute posters and information to all parties.

Again - we all have a role to play here in raising the awareness and protecting not only ourselves but other businesses, industries and the environment – so please help in communicating what Myrtle rust is and what we can do to help reduce the spread of EPP.

It has been great to learn a number of businesses have implemented initiatives to limit their public risk. Simple measures are not hard to implement such as communicating in emails, invoices, making “are you aware of Myrtle rust” and “we adopt Biosecurity measures in our business.

Latest situation update as at 25 November 2010

- Myrtle rust has been detected to 80 infected properties/sites (59) from approximately 950 individual properties across NSW
- The number of inspections which includes both surveillance and trace forward/makeup is 1169
- There are now a total of 33 nursery businesses (retail and production) trading in the sale of plants from the Myrtaceae family
- Queensland has introduced movement conditions (Inspections Approval No 384) for the entry of plants/ plant parts from the Myrtaceae family and associated products - things to refer to http://www.dp.qld.gov.au/enviropt/healthJ parcels.html#Myrtaceae
- Property freedom - inspected and accredited within last 15 days
- Property does not share rust plant material, covering, packaging or appliances with a property known to be infected
- Use clean nursery inputs - stock, containers, growing media
- Inspect all stock on arrival and only accept if it is cleaned to be free of Myrtle rust
- Establish quarantine areas (at least for several weeks)
- Inspect the nursery on a regular basis and keep records
- Clean vehicles/equipment and disinfect/sterilise them
- Consider the risk to your business (contractors, suppliers and casual staff)
- Control what you can manage and
cross the risk to you and make suitable changes to protect you, industry and the environment

The main way Myrtle rust appears to be moved is via people and plant movements so we really need to address this pathway and stop the spread.

Suey prevention is better than the cure and considering your risk and making changes to protect your business are worth every effort. Don’t believe it won’t happen to you or you don’t do it – you may not implement measures to reduce your risk.

For more information please contact me directly at the NGINA Office - 02 6679 1472.

Happy Growing!

Myrtle rust as seen on Rhodanthe rupestris

- Plants or parts of plants to be treated with approved fungicides between 10-15 days prior to dispatch
- Pesticides to be accompanied by a Plant Health Certificate (PHC)
- Prior to dispatch the PHC is to be faxed within 72 hours to Biosecurity Queensland
- There are also conditions for entry of Tissue Culture, diagnostic materials and Agricultural Machinery
- Austrian Myrtus rustor cultivars 'Aurosa' and 'Blushing Beauty' account for the majority of the detections in the nursery industry
- Austrian Myrtus cultivars 'Aurosa' and 'Blushing Beauty' account for the majority of the detections in private residences - gardens
- Foresty surveillance of all Myrtaceae plants on each IP is undertaken by trained personnel
- Myrtle rust has been detected in natural bushland and is linked to bush regeneration activities
- Myrtle rust has not been detected in inland NSW
- Myrtle rust has not been detected in interstate trace forward inspections so the possibility of spreading Myrtle rust is still high
- And yes - many nurseries are proactively developing and implementing biosecurity measures to manage the risk associated with pests and diseases such as Myrtle rust.

Updated known rust list as at 26th November 2010

- Acmena sp. (Myx) (34)
- Agonis flexuosa (woolly myrtle) Cv’s ‘Aflamek’ and ‘Runnyma’ ‘Jedda Dream’
- Austromyrtus dolichopoda Cv’s ‘Aurora’ and ‘Blushing Beauty’ (syn. Gooseberry Myrtle)
- Bocconialia chlorophylla (lemon-scented myrtle)
- Calistemon monilifera (weeping bottlebrush)
- Calistemon salignus (weeping bottlebrush)
- Lophoynamia x rapica Cv’s ‘Red Dragon’ and ‘Black Stallion’
- Melaleuca quinquenervia (braided-leaved paperbark)

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