

Prohibited pests in imported furniture

Live Japanese pine sawyer beetles (*Monochamus alternatus*) and pine wood nematodes (microscopic worms) can be present in the wooden parts of furniture supplied from eastern Asia, including China. These damaging pests would pose a serious risk to trees in the UK if they became established here, and it is prohibited by law to bring material containing them into Europe. Live specimens of both pests have been intercepted in the same items of furniture imported into the UK.



The problem

The inadvertent importation and subsequent escape of these pests is thought to have been responsible for numerous outbreaks of pine wilt disease which have killed millions of trees around the world. This disease is common in parts of Asia, including eastern China, where insects such as pine sawyer beetles spread the disease by moving around the nematodes which cause it. Both of these pests have been found together in wooden chairs landed in the UK, so there is serious concern about the possibility of further introductions in the large volume of furniture which is imported from China.



Adult beetle



Galleries in a seat frame



Exit hole in a chair frame

Implications

Legal - Plant Health Authorities have powers to seize material which they believe might contain plant pests. Seizures are usually made at the premises where material is landed, and treatment is required to make material safe. Remedial action can involve fumigation, heat treatment, incineration or re-export.

Product failure - Wooden frames which have been infested are more likely to fail than sound material. Upholstery can hide signs of wood infestation, although adult beetles have been known to bore through foam and covering leaving large holes.

Pest Alert to furniture importers

How you can help

As a precaution wooden components should be made from kiln-dried and /or heat treated material which has no signs of insect infestation. This applies especially to softwood from China. Quality control checks should be made in the country of origin and on receipt of material, and suspected cases should be reported (see 'Reporting suspected cases' below). For the purpose of surveillance, Plant Health Authorities may ask importers for samples of wood to help them determine the extent of a problem. Voluntary co-operation with this type of investigation is appreciated, and is preferred to the use of statutory powers.

What to look for

Wooden furniture frames must meet manufacturing standards, and in some cases, including flat packs, it is possible to inspect frames without removing upholstery. Live or dead insects might be found within packaging or shipping containers and signs to look for in wood include insect tunnels and bore holes in the frame. Evidence of previous insect activity is not necessarily a problem unless it represents a weakness which could lead to structural failure. Recent insect activity can be indicated by accumulations of sawdust or wood shavings close to bore holes.



A seat base construction



Sawdust in adult beetle exit hole

Reporting suspected cases

Please report suspected cases of live pests and signs of pests to one of the following:

- Forestry Commission Plant Health Service, tel: 0131 314 6214; email: plant.health@forestry.gsi.gov.uk;
- Fera Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate, tel: 01904 465625; email: planthealth.info@fera.gsi.gov.uk.
- Forest Research Tree Health Diagnostic & Advisory Service, tel: 01420 23000; email: ddas.ah@forestry.gsi.gov.uk;