

Stinky pest thwarted

The Brown Marmorated Stink Bug (BMSB) is one of the biggest risks facing New Zealand's horticultural sector and outdoor way of life, says a group of horticulture-wide organisations who have come together to help stop the damaging hitch-hiker making a home here.

Dr Ed Massey, Biosecurity and Emergency Response Manager for New Zealand Winegrowers and Chair of the BMSB Council says overseas this stinky pest has caused catastrophic damage in some areas where it has established.

"Although BMSB has managed to reach our shores in the past, it hasn't found a foothold here. This is largely due to the increased awareness people across the country have to be on the lookout and report the unusual bug, combined with increased risk management measures and the vigilance of Biosecurity New Zealand's border staff at the frontline."

Backing this up are the increasingly combined efforts of Government and industry organisations who have come together to jointly prepare for and respond to the potential impacts of BMSB, says Mr Massey.

In 2017 the BMSB Council was founded through the Government Industry Agreement (GIA) for biosecurity readiness and response. The Council is responsible for ensuring New Zealand is collectively prepared to mitigate the risks posed by this pest.

"The stink bug could cause hundreds of millions of dollars of losses for our horticulture industry, as well as seriously damaging quality of life for all New Zealanders. There is heightened awareness of biosecurity risk across the country and our industry is more aware than ever that we cannot afford to ever be complacent."

"The most recent high-risk season for BMSB started in September 2018 and finished at the end of April. There have been more than 200 live BMSB found over that time and importantly, we've prevented them from establishing."

"The finds have included a batch of live bugs that were discovered in a box of shoes bought online from overseas, finds onboard ships coming to our shores, and single bugs that were reported by residents in Mt Maunganui and Glenfield, Auckland."

Mr Massey adds that over the last year the BMSB Council has made significant progress towards mitigating the potential impact of a BMSB incursion.

"In August last year the Council successfully applied to the Environmental Protection Authority to release – with strict controls - a BMSB biocontrol in the event of an incursion. This was a major milestone and provides us with another weapon in our fight against the stink bug. We're currently planning how we might use the wasp to ensure any future release is as effective as possible."

"We've also had BMSB Council representatives recently in Tbilisi, Georgia – a country facing a disastrous BMSB outbreak - to learn more about potential management options."

In addition, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) has recently proposed amendments to relevant import regulations to further mitigate the risk of BMSB entering New Zealand from high-risk countries.

“The BMSB Council backs these moves to strengthen New Zealand’s biosecurity and ensure we are doing everything possible to continue to keep the pest at bay. There is always more we can learn but we are on the right track and confident that this year’s activities have improved our collective readiness for BMSB.”

The strongest weapon in the nation’s fight against BMSB remains public awareness says Mr Massey.

“In many countries, the winter months when the insects move inside homes to keep warm have been the time of year when new populations have been detected. It can infest homes in the thousands and is almost impossible to get rid of.”

“Unlike fruit fly or other well-known pests that are associated with specific commodities, BMSB can be found on a wide range of imported goods and in travellers’ luggage as they arrive in New Zealand. The majority have been found on ships, mail packages and personal effects coming into the country.”

“This is why help from the public is so important and makes all the difference. We ask everyone to keep an eye out for this pest because it’s feasible that it might turn up in an overseas present or package, in the pocket of a jacket in a suitcase, or even any number of surprising places - BMSB is a seriously clever hitch-hiker.

If you think you have seen BMSB inside your home catch it; snap it; report it. Call the Biosecurity New Zealand hotline 0800 80 99 66 to report your find.

-Ends-

Images attached:

BMSB on the side of a building in Italy in autumn 2017. Credit: Udine Today.

BMSB. No credit required.

10 cent coin. No credit required.

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How to identify BMSB

There are currently other species of stink bugs found in New Zealand that could be confused with BMSB. Key distinguishing features of the adult BMSB are:

- It is about the size of a 10c coin and 14-17mm long
- Look for black and white banding on the antennae and alternate black and white markings on the abdomen.



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