



Tri-County Ground Search and Rescue Group, Inc.

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Lessons Learned

Safety Hazard - Noxious Weed – Giant Hogweed

A noxious weed, imported to North America as an ornamental has found its way to New Brunswick. This weed, the Giant Hogweed represents a hazard for searchers.

The giant hogweed is a member of the parsley or carrot family, Apiaceae (Umbelliferae). The scientific name of the Giant Hogweed is *Heracleum mantegazzianum*. As one can surmise from the name, this plant is characterized by its size and may grow to 15 to 20 feet tall. Except for size, it closely resembles cow parsnip. It is further distinguished by a stout, dark reddish-purple stem and spotted leaf stalks. Stalks and stems produce sturdy pustulate bristles. The stem and stalks are hollow. Stems vary from two to four inches in diameter. The compound leaves of giant hogweed may expand to five feet in breadth. Each leaf is deeply incised. Giant hogweed is a perennial with tuberous rootstalks which form prenatating buds each year. The flower is a broad flat-topped umbel composed of many small white florets. Each bloom may attain a diameter of two and a half feet.

Giant hogweed may colonize a wide variety of habitats but is most common along roadsides, other rights-of-way, vacant lots, streams

and rivers. Since giant hogweed often grows in wet areas, it is considered to be an invasive freshwater weed.

Giant hogweed is a public health hazard. The plant exudes a clear watery sap from the leaves and particularly the stem. The sap contains a glucoside called fluramocoumarin, which renders skin photo-sensitive. This means that exposure to sunlight following contact

causes severe blistering, burns to the affected areas and sometimes inflamed linear lesions on the skin. Blisters can develop into purplish or blackened scars. These reactions can occur up to 48 hours after contact and in some cases in recurrent dermatitis. Contact with the eyes can lead to temporary or possibly permanent blindness.

If you come into contact with the plant, you are advised to wash the affected areas immediately, keep them

out of direct sunlight and seek medical advice at the earliest opportunity. Treatment with topical steroids early in the reaction can reduce severity in less severe cases. Physicians in England and Belgium report successful treatment of severe burn cases with daily dressings using silver sulfadiazine and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.



Giant hogweed has been reported in the Saint John River valley. Searchers should avoid any contact with the plant, and immediately report its presence should it be encountered. Search managers should consider the presence of the plant an extreme safety hazard, take appropriate mitigating action and report the presence of the plant to the nearest Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture Department office.



Further information:

Giant Hogweed, Washington State Department of Agriculture –

www.wa.gov/agr/weedboard/weed_info/hogweed.html

US Department of Agriculture Fact Sheet-
www.ceris.purdue.edu/napis/pests/ghw/facts.txt

Kings County, Washington State
dnr.metrokc.gov/wlr/LANDS/weeds/hogweed.htm

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