

ONEIDA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Press Release

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Environmental Experts Warn of the Dangers of Giant Hogweed

Giant Hogweed is a public health hazard that ranks higher than poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac in respect to its potential to harm humans. The reason for concern is that the sap from this plant can cause a severe skin reaction known as photo-sensitivity. The reaction can happen up to 48 hours after contact. After coming in contact with the sap, the skin blisters when exposed to sunlight. Contact with the eyes can lead to temporary or possibly permanent blindness

“The hogweed is troubling because not only is it an invasive plant, but it's a health hazard too,” said Phyllis D. Ellis, Director of Health for Oneida County.

“The clear sap that can be found in the leaves and stem of the plant can cause blisters and burns and quite a lot of serious skin irritation so it's something you want to be very careful with,” said Dan Gilmore, Director of Environmental Health. “If you come in contact with the plant you may not know right away. But after a day or two you'll feel like you have bad sunburn. Then you will notice blisters and burns.”

The Oneida County Health Department advises that washing with soap and water immediately after contact with the plant may help reduce the chances of blistering. Sap that gets in the eyes must be thoroughly flushed with water immediately in order to lower the risk of permanent blindness and seek medical advice.

Hogweed has giant, tropical-looking leaves and tall stems with multiple, umbrella-shaped flowering heads. It can be identified by the dark red or purple spots and bristles on the green stem, the white flower heads that produce thousands of seeds, and the green leaves located at the base that grow to 5 feet in diameter.

Giant hogweed plants reproduce by seed. Seeds may stay alive in the seed bank for more than five years. Since the dispersal of giant hogweed is almost entirely by seeds it is VERY important to prevent the plant from flowering and setting seed. Do Not Burn. Do Not Compost. Carefully remove flower heads from stems and place them in black plastic bags. Make sure not to drop any seeds while you are doing this. Seal the bags tightly and leave them in direct sunlight for about a week. Allow stems and roots to dry out thoroughly before disposing of them.

If you come across this giant flower, alert the New York State Department of Conservation at 1-845-256-3111 or by email at ghogweed@gw.dec.state.ny.us

New York State DEC: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/39809.html>

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