

Ash disease 'cannot be eradicated': UK minister

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Healthy ash trees at a site near Garrowby in East Yorkshire. A deadly disease threatening swathes of ash trees in Britain cannot be eradicated, the environment secretary admitted as he announced plans to stem the growing problem.

A deadly disease threatening swathes of ash trees in Britain cannot be eradicated, the environment secretary admitted on Friday as he announced plans to stem the growing problem.

An action plan agreed at a meeting of the government's [emergency response](#) committee, Cobra, will focus on tracing and destroying newly planted trees and those in nurseries found with Chalara ash dieback.

But mature trees will not be cut down or burnt even if they are found to be affected by the devastating disease.

The number of confirmed sites where ash dieback has been found has risen from 115 to 129, including 64 cases in woodland, figures from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) show.

Speaking after the meeting, Environment Secretary Owen Paterson said: "The scientific advice is that it won't be possible to eradicate this disease now that we have discovered it in mature trees in Great Britain. However, that does not necessarily mean the end of the British ash.



Kate Roberts Local Partnership Advisor of the Forestry Commission, inspects ash trees at a site near Garrowby in East Yorkshire. A deadly disease threatening swathes of ash trees in Britain cannot be eradicated, the environment secretary admitted as he announced plans to stem the growing problem.

"If we can slow its spread and minimise its impact, we will gain time to find those trees with [genetic resistance](#) to the disease and to restructure our woodlands to make them more resilient."

Emergency plans to fight the disease include an awareness-raising campaign to help environmental groups and individuals identify infected trees.

"The groups that put such a lot of effort into looking after our wildlife and our [countryside](#) will play a major role in minimising the impact of Chalara and so will the general public, especially when it comes to spotting other areas where the disease has taken hold," added Paterson, who held a summit earlier this week to address the issue.

The fungus has already killed off 90 percent of [ash trees](#) in parts of Denmark and is spreading across [central Europe](#).

The government has banned ash tree imports from abroad and destroyed 100,000 trees in response to the growing threat in Britain.

Hundreds of [government officials](#) were checking sites across the country for signs of the tree disease this week, Defra said, with plant health experts surveying a thousand sites containing saplings from nurseries where chalara has been found.

Chalara ash dieback, which is caused by a fungus called Chalara fraxinea, causes leaf loss and crown dieback in affected trees, and can cause trees to die.

The disease was first detected in Britain in March in nurseries and recently planted sites, before being discovered in woodlands and forests.

Experts believe the [fungus](#) in mature woodlands has swept in from northern France and warn that little can be done to stop the wind-borne disease from spreading.

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