



***Erwinia amylovora*/Fireblight –**

Transition from being a Protected Zone to a Union Regulated Non-Quarantine Pest (RNQP).

Frequently Asked Questions

27 March 2025

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Ireland's Fireblight status

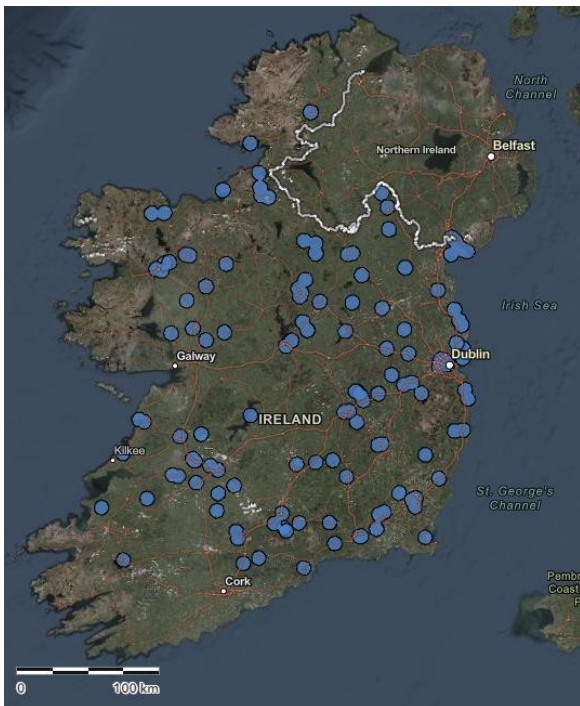
In accordance with EU Plant Health Regulation 2016/2031, Ireland (except Galway city) has a Protected zone for *Erwinia amylovora* (hereafter referred to as Fireblight).

Protected zones (PZ) are areas in the EU where a specified plant pest is not established despite suitable conditions to do so. The geographical extent of PZs is updated regularly to take account of changes in the distribution of a plant pest or disease.

Ireland's PZ designation allows producers of Fireblight host plants in Ireland (except Galway city¹) to supply customers in other Fireblight PZs. In addition, Ireland's PZ status requires that host plants from within the EU entering Ireland must have either been produced in a protected zone or a Fireblight Pest Free Area (PFA). This is certified by a "PZ" code on the plant passport. Similarly, imports of Fireblight hosts from third countries (outside the EU) must be accompanied by a phytosanitary certificate confirming that the consignment meets import requirements as set out in the regulation.

EU PZ legislative requirements require annual surveillance and eradication measures for Fireblight if found. Eradication measures must be successful within 24 months of a positive finding of the disease.

The number of detected outbreaks recorded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) in 2022, 2023 and 2024 as outlined in the map below indicates the current distribution of the disease in Ireland.



¹ Galway city is not part of the PZ due to persistent findings of Fireblight within the region. Galway city was removed from the PZ in 2014.

Based on these results and due to findings in areas where intensive eradication measures were applied previously, Ireland no longer meets the PZ requirements as set out in EU legislation and will in accordance with these requirements apply to the European Commission to revoke Ireland's PZ status for Fireblight.

This frequently asked questions (FAQ) document is produced to inform stakeholders and the public about Fireblight; to provide information on the outcome of surveillance and eradication activities for Fireblight; the intention to apply for a change in status regarding Fireblight and the implications of this change, if approved by the European Commission.



1. What is Fireblight, what are its symptoms and how does it spread?

Fireblight is a disease caused by the bacterium *Erwinia amylovora* that can be found on a wide range of plant species from the *Rosaceae* family (including for example *Malus* (apple), *Crataegus* (hawthorn), *Cotoneaster*, *Sorbus* (mountain ash), *Pyrus* (pear), *Pyracantha* (firethorn)). The most likely pathway for the spread of Fireblight is through the movement of latently infected plants (i.e. plants that show no symptoms of infestation) for planting. Once introduced, further natural spread over medium or short distances occurs mainly by insects, wind, and rain. Insects (mainly bees) act as transportation for the pathogen from infected host plants to healthy host plants. The pathogen can enter through a variety of openings in host plants, including flowers, leaves and wounds. The climate in much of the EU is suitable for Fireblight to establish. Typical symptoms of Fireblight on the host plant can be observed throughout the growing season. A plant pest factsheet on Fireblight is available online and can be accessed [here](#). Photographs showing symptoms of Fireblight on host plant material are included in Appendix 1 below.

2. What is the change that is happening with Fireblight?

In accordance with EU Plant Health legislative requirements Ireland will notify the results of the 2024 plant health surveillance programme to the European Commission. Based on the findings from the 2024 programme, Ireland no longer meets EU PZ requirements for Fireblight. Ireland intends to apply to the Commission to revoke its PZ status for Fireblight. Should the Commission revoke Ireland's PZ status for Fireblight, Fireblight will be treated as a Union Regulated Non-Quarantine Pest (RNQP) which will require controls in certain plants for planting in nurseries only. This means that these host plants in nurseries must be free from Fireblight and will be subject to surveillance and testing by DAFM to ensure regulatory requirements are met. Plants showing symptoms of Fireblight, and any surrounding host plants, must be immediately rogued out and destroyed. Imports of such plants and movement of such plants between professional operators require a Plant Passport attesting to their compliance with plant health requirements.

With the transition of Fireblight from a PZ pest to an RNQP, surveillance and controls for Fireblight in the wider environment will cease.

3. What have surveys for Fireblight in Ireland shown to date?

Fireblight was first reported in Ireland in 1986, with annual findings almost every year over the last 40 years in a range of host plants.

From 1986 to date findings have been in both professional operators' premises (such as nurseries and garden centres) and in the wider environment. The total number of samples, the number of positive samples, the number of outbreaks reported and the number of counties in which outbreaks occurred for 2022, 2023 and 2024 are presented below:

Year	Total number of samples	Number of positive samples	Number of outbreaks reported to Europhyt	Number of Counties with outbreaks
2024	499	195	108	26
2023	1,894	84	16	9
2022	1,727	8	6	4

Typically, surveillance in the past relied on the identification of plants displaying Fireblight symptoms and once Fireblight was identified, eradication measures were applied. Annual reports on findings and eradication measures were notified to the European Commission in line with regulatory requirements. In more recent years, sampling officers, aided with scientific advancements and new technology, have been able to target with more accuracy Fireblight infected material. The number of detected outbreaks in 2022 (n=6), 2023 (n=16) and 2024 (n=108) indicates a widespread distribution of the disease in Ireland.

4. Why are the number of Fireblight outbreaks higher in 2024 compared with 2022 and 2023?

In 2024 sampling officers used Fireblight Lateral Flow Devices to help them target asymptomatic/latent material (i.e. plants that show no symptoms of infestation). The use of these devices has significantly contributed to an increase in the number of positives samples identified in 2024 compared with other years.

Furthermore, the risk-based approach to the 2024 surveillance plan for Fireblight was designed to gather robust data on the distribution of Fireblight in the wider environment and targeted locations of all historical Fireblight positives since 1986. In addition, like surveillance carried out in previous years, locations from reports from DAFM officers and other government officials about host plants in decline were targeted and areas near Northern Ireland were also targeted.

In 2024, 108 outbreaks were reported almost exclusively in the wider environment across the 26 counties of Ireland in number of hosts plants, including: *Cotoneaster*, *Crataegus* (hawthorn), *Malus* (apple), *Photinia* (Red Robin), *Pyracantha* (Firethorn), *Pyrus* (pear) and *Sorbus* (mountain ash).

5. Where and in what host plants has Fireblight been found in 2024?

Fireblight has been found to be present in the wider environment in all 26 counties of Ireland. It has been most commonly found in the *Sorbus* genus (mountain ash) (n=35%) during the 2024 survey, followed by, *Crataegus* (hawthorn) (n=33%), *Cotoneaster* (n=20), *Malus* (apple) (n=8%), *Pyracantha* (firethorn) (n=2%), *Pyrus* (pear) (n=2%), and *Photinia* (Red Robin) (n=1%).

6. What happens when Fireblight is found in a Protected Zone?

In line with EU rules and based on the known biology of the pest, a “Demarcated area” (DA) consisting of an inner 500m “infested zone” and an outer 4.5km “buffer zone” is established for

each confirmed outbreak. The initial positive Fireblight finding forms the centre of the DA. Surveys, called “delimiting surveys” are then carried out. These surveys start at the location of the initial positive finding and move outwards to determine if there are more Fireblight positives findings within the 500m infested zone. If more Fireblight positives are found the boundaries of the infested zone are revised upwards, to capture all positives findings identified within the infested zone. Where the boundaries of the infested zone are revised upwards, this results in a consequential enlargement of the buffer zone. Such delimiting surveys continue until no further positives are found in the infested zone and the outer boundary of the DA is finalised. Such surveys are conducted during the plant growing season as this is when the pest can be most readily detected.

Each positive host within an infested zone must be removed and destroyed. Under EU rules a 24-month period from the official confirmation of the presence of the pest is permitted to complete surveillance and achieve eradication, where possible.

7. Why has it not been possible to protect Ireland’s PZ status for Fireblight?

Promoting and safeguarding plant health is a key strategic principle of the Plant Health and Biosecurity Strategy 2020-2025 and is aligned with the Department’s regulatory plant health responsibilities at national, EU and international level. However, while regulation on the movement of plants and surveillance for plant pests can help to reduce the risk of introduction and spread of Fireblight, it is not possible to fully mitigate these risks as plant pests know no borders and once introduced further spread of Fireblight occurs mainly by insects, wind and rain.

DAFM has adopted a risk-based approach to plant health controls and has increased its phytosanitary capacity including using scientific and technological advancements to aid surveillance. DAFM’s increased capability in this regard has resulted in increased findings of Fireblight, and crucially findings at locations where intensive eradication measures had previously taken place within 24 months. It is crucial to know what plant pests and diseases are present so that we can inform stakeholders, who in turn can mitigate the risk to their plants through management and control options.

8. Which agricultural sector is most susceptible to Fireblight?

From an Irish perspective, the top fruit sector comprising apple and pear orchards is the most susceptible to Fireblight. However, Fireblight is now effectively managed in Europe. Since it was first observed in the UK in 1957 the phytosanitary methods for managing Fireblight in apple orchards and development of resistant/tolerant apple varieties has greatly enhanced the ability of the commercial sector to live with this pest. While the pear sector across Europe has had the most difficulty with the disease, this is not a significant orchard crop in Ireland.

9. What impact does Fireblight have on biodiversity and the wider environment?

From a biodiversity perspective concerns have been raised regarding the possible long-term effect of Fireblight on *Crataegus monogyna* (hawthorn) hedgerows in Ireland, which are abundant in the wider environment. While there is little published research on the potential impact of Fireblight in the *Crataegus* (hawthorn) hedges in Ireland and across Europe, significant impacts are not expected. Fireblight has been present in the UK since at least 1957 and significant impacts on typical hedgerow species, such as *Crataegus* (hawthorn), have not been observed in the 68-year intervening period. Similarly, in Northern Ireland the pest has been acknowledged as widespread in the environment since at least 2015. Since Northern Ireland deregulated its PZ zone status in 2018 no impacts of note have been reported. Reports from the UK have consistently found *Crataegus* (hawthorn) to act as a reservoir of the disease while not being significantly impacted.

10. Did the decision to remove the requirement for Irish origin/provenance for *Crataegus* in the ACRES scheme in late 2023 contribute to application by Ireland to amend our PZ status for Fireblight?

The removal of the requirement for Irish Provenance and Irish Origin Whitethorn species under ACRES Scheme was in response to heightened demand for hedgerow plants and on request of operators. Ireland has been importing hedging material from other EU Member States for many years. It cannot be concluded that the removal of this requirement led to an increase in findings, considering that the first reports of Fireblight positive findings in Ireland were in 1986 with annual findings almost every year over the last 40 years in a range of host plants.

The application for a change in status is because Ireland can no longer meet the EU Regulatory requirements for eradication at outbreak areas within 24 months.

11. How can I reduce the risk of Fireblight infection?

General integrated pest management (IPM) is a key component to help control Fireblight. Removal of Fireblight host material not relevant to your operation will reduce the reservoir for infection.

When symptoms (see Appendix 1) are visible it is important to prune out and destroy symptomatic plant parts immediately. Ensure pruning tools (whether being pruned by hand or machine) are disinfected between cuts. In fruit trees remove secondary, late blossoms before they open. Infected material should be handled carefully to avoid cross contamination. Given the impact of human assisted spread, good hygiene is key to prevent the spread of the disease.

Asymptomatic/latent infections make Fireblight a challenging disease to control, however the use of commercially available lateral flow tests can aid in the detection of the disease.,

Methods of disposal vary but for example for large amounts of infected material, options include deep burial (at least 1.2m below ground) or burning in an approved facility. Small amounts of material (up to 200kg) can be composted.

For commercial hedge cutting services and/or large-scale operations such as motorway maintenance, disinfection of all machinery used in the process, including the tractors tyres, the cutting machine and blades is recommended.

A list of DAFM registered disinfectants can be found [here](#). Only disinfectants that are registered or approved by DAFM can be used in Ireland.

12. Can Plant Protection Products be used to help control Fireblight infection?

DAFM has authorised two plant protection products (PPPs) for use in apples and pears which include use for the control of Fireblight; Serenade ASO PCS [03847](#) and Plantivax PCS [06747](#). Follow the links to instruction for use.

DAFM has permitted the use of one plant protection product (PPP) for use on ornamental plants (e.g. garden plants that are grown for aesthetic purposes) and in commercial nurseries which include use for the control of Fireblight: Amylo-X WG PCS [06311](#). This PPP is authorised for a broad range of target diseases, including Fireblight. It should be noted that there is no official efficacy data supporting the Fireblight control claim on ornamentals or nursery stock as this use has been granted as an extension of authorisation for a minor use (EAMU) which does not require proof of efficacy. EAMU are typically applied for by stakeholders but can also be granted by DAFM when the use is in the public interest and the product already has a complete risk assessment for human and environmental safety.

There are no PPPs authorised for use in the wider environment (e.g. on hedgerows), therefore, the control is reliant upon the application of the principles of IPM. There is the possibility within the PPP legislation for DAFM to grant an authorisation for a PPP in an emergency for limited and controlled use, where such a measure appears necessary because of a danger which cannot be contained by any other reasonable means. All human, animal health and environmental risks as well as the efficacy of the product would be evaluated as part of such an emergency approval. Emergency Authorisations are typically applied for by stakeholders but can also be authorised by DAFM in the absence of a specific application if DAFM deems that the circumstances warrant such an approval (for example in the case of a significant outbreak in the wider environment). DAFM is evaluating possible situations where control, including emergency authorisation of certain PPPs for use in the wider environment is required.

13. What is the status of Fireblight in the rest of the European Union?

Fireblight is regulated as either a Union Regulated Non-Quarantine Pest (RNQP) in areas where it occurs more widely or as a Protected Zone (PZ) quarantine pest in areas where it is not present.

Within a European context, Estonia, Finland, and Latvia have PZ status in their entire territories and France, Italy, Lithuania, and Spain have certain regions of their territory declared as PZs. In all other areas within the EU Fireblight is regulated as an RNQP.

14. What is the status of Fireblight in Northern Ireland?

Following a survey in 2015 which found the pest present in 86 different locations in Northern Ireland, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) proposed to remove the PZ for Fireblight in Northern Ireland. In 2018 Northern Ireland's PZ status for the Fireblight was removed and since then Fireblight is regulated as an RNQP in Northern Ireland.

This is significant given that the island of Ireland is regarded as a single epidemiological unit. This means that Ireland and Northern Ireland cannot be distinguished from one another geographically when it comes to plant health given the ubiquitous distribution of host plants across the island of Ireland and the inability to restrict the movement of Fireblight via insects, wind and rain.

15. What is the plant passport requirement when Fireblight is regulated as an RNQP?

All plants for planting require a plant passport for the purposes of moving between professional operators' premises. Prior to the issuance of a plant passport, professional operators must carry out examinations of their plants to attest to their freedom from quarantine pests and RNQPs as listed in the Regulations. Details on plant passport formats can be found [here](#). With the removal of the Fireblight PZ in Ireland, the specific declaration on a plant passport to declare freedom for Fireblight will no longer be required. Therefore, the PZ - Plant Passport code will no longer be necessary, unless you are going to trade to a professional operator in another Fireblight PZ. The requirement to attach a PZ plant passport to Fireblight host material sold via E-Commerce to final users will be removed.

16. How will DAFM controls in plants for planting in nurseries change when Fireblight is regulated as an RNQP.

DAFM officials will conduct visual inspections of the specific ornamental plants and fruit plants for which Fireblight RNQP tolerances have been set in the plant health regulation (Fireblight RNQP tolerances = 0%). For propagating material of ornamental plants and other plants intended for ornamental purposes, these include *Amelanchier*, *Chaenomeles* (flowering quince), *Cotoneaster*, *Crataegus* (hawthorn), *Cydonia* (common quince), *Eriobotrya* (loquat), *Malus* (apple), *Mespilus* (medlar), *Photinia davidiana* (Stranvaesia), *Pyracantha*, *Pyrus* (pear) and

Sorbus (mountain ash). For fruit propagating material and fruit plants intended for fruit production, these include *Cydonia* (common quince), *Malus* (apple) and *Pyrus* (pear)

17. What are the implications for Professional Operators who are importing Fireblight host plants?

If importing regulated hosts from the EU, they must have a plant passport. A PZ plant passport is no longer required. If importing regulated hosts from a third country, they must be accompanied by a valid phytosanitary certificate. The details of these certificates are set out by DAFM in line with RNQP regulatory requirements.

18. What are the implications for Professional Operators who are exporting Fireblight host plants?

If exporting regulated host plants to EU areas without a Fireblight PZ, host plants require a regular, non PZ-plant passport. If exporting to an EU area that has a PZ, then a PZ-plant passport is required. If exporting regulated hosts outside of the EU, the third country in question will determine the requirements for the accompanying phytosanitary certificate.

19. If I am a Professional Operator and want to trade into other Fireblight Protected Zones what do I need to do?

Professional Operators can apply to DAFM at PlantExports@agriculture.gov.ie to establish a "Pest Free Area" (PFA) for Fireblight in line with the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM) 4, details of which can be found [here](#).

A PFA is an area surrounding a horticultural business which is maintained free of Fireblight by that business. If a business is operating within a Fireblight PFA it can trade Fireblight host plants into other protected zones.

Appendix 1



Figure 1. Fireblight symptoms on the host plant *Malus* (Apple).



Figure 2. Fireblight symptoms on the host plant *Cotoneaster*.



Figure 3. Fireblight symptoms on the host plant *Sorbus aria* (Whitebeam).



Figure 4. Fireblight symptoms on the host plant *Sorbus aucuparia* (Rowan or Mountain Ash).



Figure 5. Fireblight symptoms on the host plant *Crataegus monogyna* (Hawthorn).