

## ADVISORY INFORMATION – COMMON RAGWORT



Ragwort is an important source of nectar for many insects.

A common concern amongst quarry site managers is that allowing ragwort to grow will threaten livestock, potentially causing management conflicts and having cost implications for future quarrying activities. However, with careful planning, conflicts can normally be resolved. This advice does not seek to eradicate ragwort.

### What is Ragwort?

Common Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* is a native plant with yellow, daisy-like flowers. Ragwort is a native species of the British Isles. It is a specified weed under the Weeds Act 1959. The control of ragwort is also covered under the provisions of the Ragwort Control Act 2003. It contains toxins which can have debilitating or fatal consequences, if eaten by horses and other grazing animals.

### Key Points

- Ragwort, as a native plant, is very important for wildlife in the UK. It supports a wide variety of invertebrates and is a major nectar source for many insects.
- It is a natural component of many types of unimproved grassland and is used by some invertebrate species that have conservation needs.
- It is necessary to prevent its spread where this presents a high risk of poisoning horses and livestock or spreading to fields used for the production of forage.
- In many situations ragwort poses no threat to horses and other livestock.

### Why is Ragwort a problem?

Ragwort has evolved to be toxic to grazing animals as a form of defence, which principally damage the liver. Most grazing animals are susceptible to ragwort poisoning. Ragwort's toxic effects on horses can be very serious. Although horses will not normally eat ragwort, it becomes undetectable when incorporated into preserved forage. Horses may also resort to the consumption of ragwort when there is shortage of food.

Action to prevent its spread should be taken on quarries where ragwort poses a high risk to land used for grazing, or forage production.

### **Assessing the Risk Posed by Ragwort**

Where land is affected by ragwort the quarry manager should make an assessment to determine whether action should be taken to prevent the spread of ragwort to neighbouring land by establishing the risk posed to grazing animals or forage production.

The following three risk categories are provided for assessing risk:

#### **High Risk:**

- Ragwort is present and flowering/seeding within 50m of land used for grazing by horses and other animals or land used for feed/forage production

#### **Medium Risk:**

- Ragwort is present within 50m to 100m of land used for grazing by horses and other animals or land used for feed/forage production

#### **Low Risk:**

- Ragwort or the land on which it is present is more than 100m from land used for grazing by horses and other animals or land used for feed/forage production.

The distances given above are guidelines *only* and when assessing risk, account should also be taken of particular local circumstances and other relevant factors such as prevailing winds, topography, shelter belts, natural barriers, soil type and vegetation cover of receiving land. Whether or not the density of ragwort is high or low, the risk factor will be determined by the likelihood of it spreading to land used for grazing and/or feed/forage production.

### **Action to be taken by site manager**

- where a **high risk** is identified
  - take **immediate** action to control the spread of ragwort using an appropriate control technique taking account of the status of the land
- where a **medium risk** is identified
  - establish a control policy to ensure that where a change from a medium to a high risk of spread can be anticipated, it is identified and dealt with in a timely and effective manner using appropriate control techniques
- where a **low risk** is identified
  - no immediate action is required

Where the risk that ragwort will spread available control methods are:

### **Manual control**

Plants can be pulled out by hand, although precautions should be taken to prevent ragwort plants coming into contact with the skin. Rosettes can be dug out in the early spring. This is labour-

intensive work, but very effective on a small scale. Hand pulling is appropriate for smaller areas but for larger areas the use of machine pulling should be considered

### Using herbicides

Individual ragwort plants can be killed by dabbing herbicide onto rosettes. Herbicide must be very carefully applied to individual plants so that non-target plants nearby are not affected. This is why spraying whole areas, as opposed to treating individual ragwort plants, is not recommended.

### Disposal of dead ragwort

Any ragwort management should include removal of all dead and dying material if there is any possibility of grazing animals using the site. This material must be disposed of carefully and **should not be composted**.

### Ongoing site management

Wherever possible quarry land with low levels of ragwort should remain undisturbed. Where an open sward is maintained and ragwort can be expected to be a natural component of grassland, other control methods might be necessary to prevent ragwort becoming a problem.

### Learning Points

- **Site managers should adopt a balanced, sensitive approach to ragwort control, giving full regard to animal welfare, the legal requirement to prevent spread, and to wildlife conservation.**
- **Annually monitor levels of common ragwort onsite.**
- **Assess the level of risk according to criteria above.**
- **Should the risk be deemed high, contact the CEMEX Restoration manager.**
- **Appropriate action will then be determined for the site.**
- **Where land is not grazed or used for forage production, ragwort is part of a diverse plant community and has biodiversity conservation benefits.**

### Useful Contacts

A Code of Practice and guidance on how to prevent the spread of ragwort is available from Defra.

Plantlife are a charity that speaks up for the nation's wild plants [www.plantlife.org.uk](http://www.plantlife.org.uk)