# Communicating tree health risks - UNPICK



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## Understanding Public Risk Concerns: An investigation into the social perception, interpretation and communication of tree health risks

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The surge in media coverage and increase in public concern about tree health in late 2012 following confirmation of the Chalara ash dieback fungus had arrived in the UK took many by surprise. Over a period of weeks, the threat to tree health from a number of pests and diseases became a major focus of public debate, drawing attention to the role that individuals and communities will need to play in the future prevention and management of tree disease outbreaks. The public response to ash dieback prompts deeper questions about the rapidly evolving nature of public risk understandings and the social and cultural factors which shape them. These need to be better understood if policy makers and risk managers are to engage with publics more effectively and build trust in platforms such as Defra's Plant Health Risk Register. This project will use a range of social science methods to compare public reaction and involvement with three recent tree disease outbreaks in the UK (ash dieback, ramorum blight and the oak processionary moth).

The study will explore how individuals encounter tree pests and diseases in different contexts and assess the role of media coverage and various forms of risk communication in raising awareness. The project will examine how concern has developed over time and identify the different "hazard sequences" that may have influenced perceptions and understandings of risk in these cases. The research will contribute to the policy evidence base by defining the nature of public concern about this important issue, drawing lessons for future risk communication and engagement.

Project website https://www.imperial.ac.uk/unpick/

*This project is in partnership with University of Bath and Forest Research (project participants).*

**Specific objectives (edited for this web site):**

1. To develop a social risk analytical framework in order to better understand the nature, extent and likely future development of public risk concerns in relation to invasive tree pests and diseases.

2 To demonstrate in three tree pest and diseases the way risks and uncertainty have been framed and communicated by scientists, policymakers and biosecurity professionals over the course of outbreaks in their role as risk amplification stations.

3. To further document and analyse from secondary sources the role of traditional and social media in the communication and interpretation of tree health risks during these outbreaks.

4. To analyse and compare the resulting public risk concerns and understandings of observing, affected, engaged and general publics in relation to these outbreaks.

5. To identify public engagement and risk communication implications of the work by exploring approaches and mechanisms with policymakers, risk managers and communicators how they can become more responsive to, and engaged with, public risk concerns.

## Downloads

| File | Modified ▲ |
|---|---|
| Microsoft Word Document UNPICKFlyer.docx<br>UNPICK - flyer | Sep 16, 2015 by Jill Thompson |

## Further Information

- Project participants - UNPICK

## Recently Updated

Social Science workshop
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