

GM PETUNIAS

BACKGROUND

MPI has taken action after an overseas recall on unauthorised genetically modified (GM) petunias.

Several varieties of GM petunias have been reported in Europe, USA and Australia, and are being recalled by regulatory authorities there.

MPI has identified potentially affected seeds from one importer in New Zealand and has sent them for testing in an MPI-approved laboratory overseas.

Those test results came back positive for genetically modified material in the 'African Sunset' variety. We feel there are sufficient parallels with what's going on elsewhere in the world for us to take pre-emptive action on other varieties which have tested positive overseas and are known to be in New Zealand.

We have no evidence to suggest the GM material was deliberately brought into New Zealand. The importer concerned was unaware of the GM content of these seeds and, as soon as they became aware of the possibility, they contacted MPI. We applaud them for that.

This is a global situation, many other countries are dealing with the same issue and MPI is working closely with our overseas counterparts. It seems that no authorities anywhere in the world were aware that these varieties of petunia contained or were bred with GM plant material.

WHAT IS THE RISK?

There is negligible biosecurity risk from these seeds and no risk to people or the environment. However, New Zealand has strict controls around genetically modified organisms (new organism). It is illegal to import, develop, field test or release a genetically modified organism without approval. MPI is an enforcement agency for new organisms.

It is unlikely there are any plants currently in circulation and the risk of these plants becoming established is negligible. Petunias are often grown as annuals, so they complete their life cycle in one year. They also do not set seed efficiently, so their ability to grow in the wild, shed seeds and spread is negligible.

AFFECTED VARIETIES

The varieties identified as GE and currently known to have been imported into New Zealand are marketed under the names African Sunset (an orange flowered variety), Trilogy Red (also known as Diva Red) and Trilogy Deep Purple (also known as Diva Deep Purple).



Trilogy Deep Purple



African Sunset



Trilogy Red

June 2017

WHAT IS MPI DOING?

We will be instituting new actions at the border. MPI is amending the seed and nursery stock Import Health Standard. Before being allowed to enter New Zealand all Petunia species imported as plants for planting or seeds for sowing will require a GMO certificate stating they have been tested and are GM free.

MPI is working with industry to trace and destroy all seed stock and unsold plants existing in New Zealand.

We have made it clear to businesses holding the suspected GM petunia varieties that they must not be sold, and therefore will have to be taken off the market. While these plants and seeds do not present a risk, they do not have regulatory approval, this means it is an offence to knowingly plant or otherwise propagate them. Any existing stock will be destroyed.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Anyone who may have purchased petunias with these variety names are advised to remove the plants from their garden and dispose of them in their domestic/household rubbish. Any seeds or unplanted seedlings can be disposed of the same way. We ask that the public not dispose of plant material or seeds in compost or green waste.

A number of other varieties around the world are also known to be GM. For more detail visit www.mpi.govt.nz/protection-and-response

MORE INFORMATION IS AT:

Ministry for Primary Industries: www.mpi.govt.nz

MPI general enquiries: **0800 00 83 33**

For more information: info@mpi.govt.nz

www.mpi.govt.nz

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