

# DON'T SPREAD DIDYMO



## Background

*Didymosphenia geminata* (Didymo) was found in the lower Waiau and Mararoa rivers in October 2004. A second find was made in the upper reaches of the Buller River in Tasman District in September 2005. The natural distribution of this algae is northern Europe and northern North America.

Its presence in New Zealand may be the first in the southern hemisphere.

*Didymosphenia geminata* is an unwanted organism under the Biosecurity Act 1993. Under the Act those knowingly spreading an unwanted organism can be liable for up to five years' imprisonment or a \$100,000 fine.

It is not considered a significant human health risk but is considered an invasive species overseas.

## Description

*Didymosphenia geminata* is a freshwater diatom (a type of algae). It can form massive blooms on the bottom of streams, rivers and rarely in the wave swept zone of lakes.

The algae attaches itself to the streambed by stalks and can form a thick brown layer that smothers rocks, submerged plants and other materials. It forms flowing streamers that can turn white at their ends and look similar to tissue paper. Although the algae appears slimy, it feels like wet cotton wool.

## Stop the spread

Didymo is made up of cells that cannot be seen with the naked eye until large colonies form. It only takes one of these cells to survive and be transported to nearby waterways for this invasive algal species to spread. These cells thrive in freshwater and by cleaning with freshwater you are helping to keep them alive.

To ensure that you do not spread Didymo, you must clean all items that have been in affected waters using the following approved methods:

1) Before leaving the river, remove obvious clumps of algae, taking care to search for hidden clumps which may be obscured within compartments. Leave clumps at the affected site. After leaving the affected area, if you find clumps, do not wash clumps down drains, treat them chemically as outlined below.

2) Soak and scrub all items for at least one minute in hot (60°C) water, a two percent solution of household bleach or a five percent solution of salt, nappy cleaner, antiseptic hand cleaner or dishwashing detergent.

**Note:** For a two percent solution, add 200 mls to a ten litre bucket and fill with water. For a five percent solution, add 500 mls (two heavy cups) to a ten litre bucket and fill with water.

3) All items must be completely dry for 48 hours. The time starts when the item is completely dry.

Under no circumstances should fish, rocks, plants or other items be moved from an affected waterway to an unaffected waterway.



## THE THREAT

Overseas this algae is considered an invasive species that can form massive blooms. Thick growths can adversely affect fresh water fish, plant and invertebrate species by reducing the number of suitable habitats.



If you require more information please visit:

[www.biosecurity.govt.nz/didymo](http://www.biosecurity.govt.nz/didymo)

September 2005



**BIOSECURITY**  
NEW ZEALAND