

'Spread of toxic plant under control'

Agriculture Dept: 'Worst weed of the century' being held at bay by herbicides

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PETALING JAYA: The toxic invasive weed spreading through the country is under control for now, said the Agriculture Department's Plant Biosecurity Division.

The weed (*Parthenium hysterophorus*), which currently covers 60ha of land across most states, is being held at bay by herbicides.

"The affected areas were sprayed with herbicide and follow-up sprays were carried out. People are also more aware about its existence and impact on plants, animals and humans.

"Nine agencies have come together to battle the weed including the Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) and the Institute of Medical Research," it said in an e-mail.

Research is being carried out

about the effects of the weed, also called congress grass, on human health.

DVS has since stepped up its monitoring of imported animals to ensure they are not transporting any seeds, and it is ready to impose quarantine conditions on countries found exporting livestock with parthenium seeds in or on them, especially in faecal matter.

The Malaysian Quarantine and

Inspection Services would also quarantine agricultural materials, especially seeds and planting material, if there is sufficient risk of parthenium coming through Malaysian entry points.

Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti Malaya Kelantan (UMK) are researching control methods for the weed, which has been dubbed the "worst weed of the century".

UMK Prof Dr S. M. Rezaul Karim,

who first discovered the weed in Ulu Yam in 2013, warned the public to avoid it at all costs.

"The pollen grains, airborne dried plant parts, and roots of parthenium cause various allergies like contact dermatitis, hay fever, asthma and bronchitis.

"Its pollen is responsible for asthma, especially in children playing outdoors," he said when contacted.