

Search for this hostile plant

BY DAVID JOHNSTON

ALBURY residents are being urged to inspect any garden beds containing locally purchased sugar cane mulch after the African horned cucumber plant was detected in the city.

The species was discovered in a residential backyard last week growing in sugar cane mulch purchased from a local nursery.

Although not a noxious weed, it is a self-seeding species that can run rampant.

Albury Council's vegetation management officer Steve Onley said residents were being asked to quickly remove the plant if they detected it growing.

"There's no need for alarm, it's not a dangerous species," he said.

"But it will take over your backyard if you don't remove it quickly."

"If it's allowed to grow it will choke other plants and flowers and become harder to eradicate."

"We're advising residents to keep an eye on anything that might sprout from sugar cane mulch purchased locally."

"If you find anything that resembles the African horned cucumber we'd advise you to remove it straight away."

It is the first time the plant has been detected in Albury and council is working with local nurseries to eradicate the source.

RIGHT: Vegetation manager for the Albury Council Steve Onley with the mystery weed which has shown up in sugar cane mulch. Picture: DAVID THORPE



The wait is longer for too few paramedics

BY AISHA DOW

THE problem of unfilled paramedic shifts in the Hume region doubled last year, forcing Border residents with serious conditions to wait up to 38 minutes for an ambulance.

Figures produced by Victoria's Labor opposition show 518 ambulance shifts were not filled last year — up from 252.

But Ambulance Victoria said Labor's figure needed to be kept in perspective.

"Each day we roster more than 620 shifts — each year we roster more than 240,000 shifts and almost 99 per cent of those shifts operate as scheduled," Hume regional manager Garry Cook said.

"An unfilled shift

2012 UNFILLED SHIFTS

Region	Unfilled Shifts
Barwon South West	192
Grampians	218
Loddon Mallee	462
Hume	518
Gippsland	311
Metropolitan Melbourne	1238
Regional Victoria	1701
Statewide Total	2939

doesn't mean there is not an ambulance available.

"We often team our managers or ambulance community officers with a paramedic to form a crew, ensuring we can provide a response in local areas."

The ambulance union has also taken aim at emergency response times as being a concern.

It took an average 22 minutes for paramedics to respond to code 1 incidents from July 2011 to October last year in the Wodonga area. The wait at Wangaratta was 30 minutes.

And it was worse at Tallangatta and Beechworth where there was 37 to 38-minute wait.

While Mr Cook agreed regional cities were supposed to meet a government 15-minute benchmark, they were often responding to incidents in towns more than 15 minutes drive away.

He cited Chiltern, in Wodonga's area, as a trip that took more than 20 minutes.

"Our aim is to deliver an ambulance to Wodonga within 15 minutes," he said.

"It's reasonable within communities adjoining regional cities that it will take longer than that to get the nearest ambulance to them."

Ambulance Employees Australia state secretary Steve McChie said the fundamental issue was ambulances not being properly staffed.

As a result, paramedics had to work harder and longer to fill the gaps.

Mr McChie also said paramedics were telling him every day that they were forced to work beyond their knock-off time to make up for a lack of resources. Some worked 15 to 16 hours straight without a meal break.

Senior paramedic at Wodonga Scott Burns urged Victoria's Health Minister David Davis to check conditions himself.

"You turn up to some jobs and you're 30 minutes late — and we're the ones who cop the abuse and the disappointment from patients," Mr Burns said.

"He needs to get out and see what's going on instead of sitting behind his desk in Melbourne."

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Aussies spend less time online

THE amount of time Australians spend on social media sites is declining, according to new research involving three million internet users.

Interest in sites like Facebook and Twitter grew rapidly in Australia from 2010.

But new data shows time spent on these sites via fixed-line internet connections fell last year, with average users now spending 14 minutes out of every hour online using social networks, compared to 16 minutes per hour in 2011.

Similar falls were recorded in the US and Britain.

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