

## Fire Blight Blazing in Ohio Apple Orchards!

All was quiet until today, when I started to get reports of fire blight in several orchards and home plantings across the state. To be honest, I wasn't overly surprised. Since May 2 we have had 28 to 35 days of high to extreme risk for fire blight depending on the growing region. As rain continues to be in the forecast and temperatures stay in the mid to high 70F, new shoot growth will occur and the bacteria will continue to replicate and spread. For trees that were not protected with streptomycin during bloom, fire blight will most likely be present at some level in the orchard this year.

The only way to slow fire blight infections after bloom is to slow down shoot growth and promote hardening-off. **With the exception of rescue sprays after hail or high wind damage, spraying streptomycin or any other antibiotic after bloom will not stop the spread of fire blight.** So, what can you do right now if you have moderate to severe fire blight in your orchard?

- Apply a growth regulator such as Apogee or Kudos at 12 oz/acre. A non-ionic surfactant such as Regulaid should be added to the tank mix to improve performance consistency. Refer to the product labels for other recommendations and restrictions. For young dwarf blocks a rate of Apogee or Kudos can be reduced to 6 oz/A.
- Apogee and Kudos take about 10-15 days to “kick in”, but growth suppression can last for 2-5 weeks per application. During the 10-15 day “kick in” period, Cueva can be applied at 2 qt/A to limit the spread of bacteria. Refer to the product label for application restrictions for Cueva.
- If weather conditions that promote shoot growth persist, a second application of Apogee or Kudos may be needed, especially on highly susceptible varieties. However, once the shoots harden-off they are no longer susceptible to fire blight.

Since it is turning out to be a bad year for fire blight growers should prioritize which blocks they focus on for immediate treatment. Young blocks (3-8 years old) with a few fire blight strikes should be given the highest priority, followed by young blocks with severe strikes, and older blocks with a few strikes. Fire blight can kill a young tree very quickly, therefore regular scouting is critical, especially in newly planted blocks.



Fire blight symptoms in a commercial orchard (top) and home garden (middle). Bottom image is a close up of a typical fire blight spike.

For more information on fire blight or other fruit diseases contact Melanie L. Lewis Ivey, Dept. Plant Pathology, Wooster OH.

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