

Increasing concern about Gum Leaf Skeletoniser, *Uraba lugens*, causing contact dermatitis in humans

Andrew Pugh *¹, Stephanie Kirk ¹, Toni Withers ¹, Belinda Gresham ¹

¹ Scion, Private Bag 3020, Rotorua 3046

Gum Leaf Skeletoniser (*Uraba lugens*) is a pest lepidopteran from Australia whose larvae attack and defoliate eucalyptus trees. Eucalyptus trees form a prominent component of New Zealand's urban and rural landscape, as well as being important to the forest industry. The larvae of Gum Leaf Skeletoniser are covered in urticating hairs which cause a harmful rash to human skin called contact dermatitis. This occurs when either larvae, or the shed skins of larvae touch bare human skin. Upon contact an instantaneous raised rash develops accompanied by a painful burning itch that can recur for up to 4 weeks at a time. Gum Leaf Skeletoniser has been in New Zealand since approximately 1995. It was initially subject to a successful eradication (in Tauranga), but once found to be well established in Auckland in 2001, biological control became the focus of pest management efforts. Gum Leaf Skeletoniser is now distributed throughout the upper North Island above Tokoroa/ Rotorua/ Whakatane, as well as in the Hawkes Bay. A limited population exists in Nelson. Very high populations of the pest in public parks have this summer been observed in Auckland, Hamilton, and Napier cities. As well as mass releases of the specialist parasitoid *Cotesia urabae* against these infestations, Scion will be talking to councils and the public to increase awareness of the dangers of the larvae and their exuviae as causative agents of contact dermatitis in humans.

