Media Release

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Moth finds in Auckland

A male moth was detected in a fall webworm trap on 7 February 2005 in Mount Wellington Auckland, Biosecurity New Zealand acting director of post-clearance Ian Gear said today.

"We have confirmed the moth as the fall webworm, the same species of moth that was discovered in the Mount Wellington area two years ago," he said.

"The fall webworm is considered to be a particularly serious pest as it feeds on a wide variety of plants and could have a significant negative impact on our urban and native trees, horticulture industry and commercial forestry.

"We were hopeful, but not confident, that we had eradicated the fall webworm incursion that arrived two years ago. This latest find shows the success of our continued surveillance for this pest," Ian Gear said.

Biosecurity New Zealand (BNZ) will conduct a ground search in the immediate area where the moth was found and increase the density of the trapping grid in the area.

BNZ developed a contingency plan two years ago after the first fall webworm was found. Eradication options will be considered next week by a technical advisory group. One of these options is aerial treatment.

BNZ will keep residents in the area informed of any proposed activity.

Meanwhile another single male moth was detected in a fall webworm trap on 17 January 2005 in Hillsborough Auckland.

"We have identified the moth as belonging to the *Spilosoma* genus, which is the same family as the fall webworm.

Although scientists have been able to identify the moth's genus, they are yet to identify its species. The identification has been particularly difficult because the moth was badly damaged. The moth has been sent to an international laboratory to confirm its genus and species.

Biosecurity New Zealand has started a response to the find, which includes the placement of light-emitting traps at random properties within a 150 metre radius, as the moth is nocturnal. As the fall webworm pheromone lure can attract moths of the *Spilosoma* genus, fall webworm traps have been placed out to a 500 metre radius from the initial find.

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"BNZ has also started a tracing investigation to try and establish the possible entry pathway of the *Spilosoma* moth. Ground searches have been completed in the Hillsborough area. There are a number of transitional facilities within a 5km radius of this find, including two within the Hillsborough area.

"At this stage we are not sure if the *Spilosoma* moth is a solitary hitchhiker from recently imported goods or from a recently established population. Further actions will depend on the outcome of species identification.

"If *Spilosoma* species is confirmed, more investigation and follow-up work will be considered, such as increased ground searches, movement control and community information." Ian Gear said.

The majority of *Spilosoma* species are also known to feed on a wide variety of plants.

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