

Tackling the threat of spongy moth

01

Guide



How to keep your vessel safe

The spongy moth is one of the most damaging and invasive biosecurity threats currently facing international shipping.

Native to East Asia – particularly China, Japan, Korea, and the Russian Far East – it covers several moth species, and is collectively known as Flighted Spongy Moth Complex (FSMC).

It may also appear under its previous name, the Asian Gypsy Moth, in pre-2022 regulations.

But whatever the name, the threat is the same.

Female moths can fly up to 40 km (25 miles) to find a vessel. Drawn to ship lights, they can lay egg masses in almost any part of a vessel. These small, tan, fuzzy clusters are around 2.5cm or one inch in diameter, each containing hundreds of eggs. They're hard to spot, and extremely tough – surviving long ocean crossings, and extreme heat, cold, and salt spray for up to a year.

Once transported overseas, they hatch into caterpillars that feed on more than 300 tree and shrub species – stripping forests, damaging agriculture, and threatening

ecosystems. Because of this, regulators worldwide take a zero-tolerance approach.

Recognised as a global threat because of the extensive damage, many countries – including the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Chile, and Argentina – have strict rules in place. These include certification before departure and advance notification of port calls.

Ships arriving with infestations face delays, quarantine, or outright refusal of entry. For shipowners, charterers, and crew, that means disruption, added cost, and liability.





Key risks for shipping

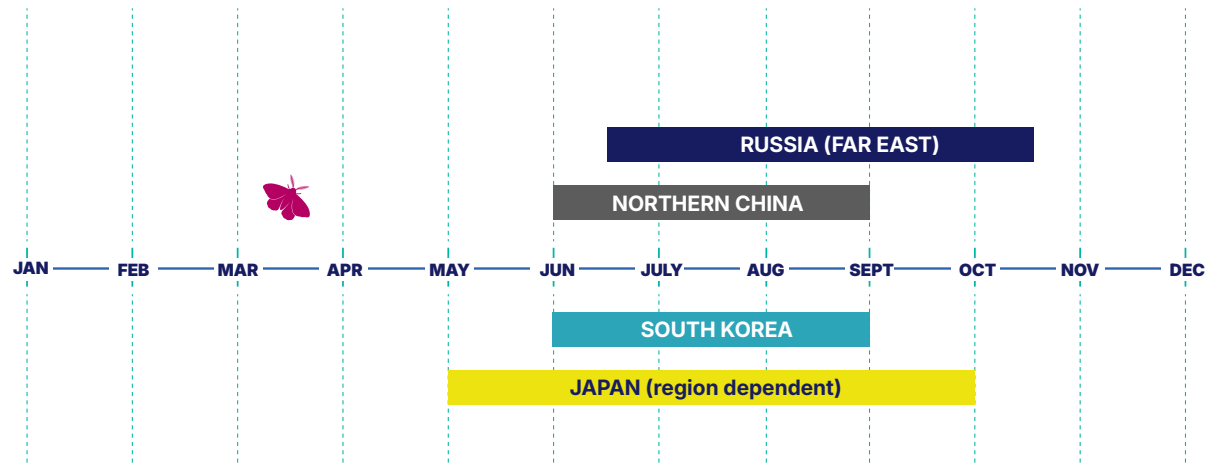
The risks are environmental, operational, and commercial, and are at their height in these regions, during these times:

- **Russia (Far East)** – mid-June to mid-October.
- **Northern China** – June to September.
- **South Korea** – June to September.
- **Japan** – May to October (depending on the region).

Moths lay egg masses on almost any part of the ship, including:

- The superstructure.
- Deck equipment and machinery.
- Holds, cargo areas, cargo gear and containers.
- Sheltered areas, such as bridge wings, behind doors, and light fittings – places that are easy to miss during routine checks.

The spongy moth seasons



If they go undetected and the vessel reaches a regulated country, the consequences can be serious:

- Quarantine and long inspection delays.
- Refused entry to port or orders to leave national waters.
- Costly decontamination before operations can continue.
- Cargo disruption, extra port charges, and potential insurance or legal issues.

Preventing FSMC is the only way to avoid expensive disruption.



Protecting your vessel – the essentials

Spongy moth infestations are avoidable if ships take the right steps at the right time. Prevention comes down to preparation, vigilance, and clear documentation:

- **Get inspected** – arrange an official inspection before leaving a high-risk port, as close to departure time as possible.
- **Get certification** – Certificate of Inspection of Freedom from FSMC or Phytosanitary Certificate.
- **Prepare the vessel** – keep decks clear, repair cracks and sheltered spaces, and reduce unnecessary lighting where possible.
- **Inspect carefully** – train crew to spot egg masses and carry out thorough daylight checks before departure.
- **Remove and destroy** – if egg masses are found, scrape them off, bag them, and destroy them by burning, boiling, freezing, or soaking in alcohol. Never paint over them or wash them into the sea.
- **Document everything** – certificates, logbook entries, and photos are vital evidence of compliance.

BIMCO has also developed a Flighted Spongy Moth Complex Clause for Time Charter Parties to clarify owners' and charterers' responsibilities for preventing and certifying vessels are FSMC-free.

[Read the full details.](#)

Spongy moth prevention

Follow this simple, step-by-step, interactive tick box guide when trading or voyaging to high-risk regions during spongy moth season.

Before departure (from high-risk ports)

- ☐ Arrange an official inspection and get the required certificate.
- ☐ Make sure the certificate covers your last regulated port of call.
- ☐ Keep decks clear of clutter and repair cracks or cavities where eggs could hide.
- ☐ Reduce unnecessary lighting or replace bright lights with yellow or sodium lamps that are less attractive to moths.
- ☐ Brief crew on what to look for and how to report it.

Daylight self-inspection (before sailing)

- ☐ Check the accommodation block, superstructure, and bridge wings.
- ☐ Inspect deck equipment, cranes, winches, and cargo gear.
- ☐ Look around light fittings, behind doors, under tarpaulins, and in other sheltered spaces.
- ☐ Examine containers, hatch covers, coamings, and mooring stations.

- ☐ Use mirrors and binoculars to inspect hard-to-reach areas.
- ☐ Record all inspections and findings in the deck logbook.

If egg masses are found

- ☐ Photograph each finding for records.
- ☐ Wear gloves, a mask, and protective clothing.
- ☐ Work in a well-ventilated area.
- ☐ Scrape the egg mass carefully into a plastic collection bag, avoiding loose debris.
- ☐ Collect the entire egg mass – partial removal is ineffective.
- ☐ Destroy completely by burning, boiling water, freezing, or soaking in alcohol.
- ☐ Never paint over or wash with seawater – the eggs may survive.
- ☐ Record the removal and disposal in the logbook, and keep evidence for at least 24 months.

During the voyage

- ☐ Repeat inspections at sea, especially around light-exposed areas.
- ☐ Watch for signs of live larvae or adult moths.
- ☐ Continue recording all inspections and actions in the logbook.

On arrival

- ☐ Forward inspection certificates to local agents in advance (some countries require up to 96 hours' notice).
- ☐ Be prepared for an arrival inspection by authorities.
- ☐ Provide logbook entries and photographic evidence if requested.