



ATTENTION

Do Not Touch! No Tocar!



Douglas-Fir Tussock Moth:

Forest areas in New Mexico are experiencing increased and observable levels of Douglas-Fir Tussock Moth (DFTM) caterpillars. This native insect to the Southwest periodically reaches outbreak levels that last up to four years. Currently, outbreaks of caterpillars are being found on forested lands across Northern and Central New Mexico.

Mature caterpillars are identified by three, long, black tufts; one located on the rear of the insect and two on the head. The caterpillar feeds on needles of Douglas-fir and white fir often resulting in severe defoliation damage, which is sometimes followed by

top-kill (tree crown) and subsequent attacks by bark beetles on stressed trees.

Douglas-fir tussock moths have one generation per year. Eggs are laid in July-August and remain dormant over winter, hatching in mid-May to early June the following year. First and second instars disperse by wind using silken thread. Young caterpillars feed on new foliage and eventually (mid-growth) feed on all age classes of needles. Pupation occurs in silk cocoons on undersides of branches during July-August. Adults emerge (10-18 days) and the flightless female immediately signal males and mate. Females typically deposits egg masses on the cocoon from which it emerged.

Male Moth wingspan ~30 mm



Flightless female body ~19 mm

The DFTM caterpillars have thousands of tiny hairs covering their bodies. The female moths, egg masses, and cocoons also have hairs. Tussockosis can occur as an allergic reaction from direct contact with insects or airborne hairs. Symptoms may include itchiness, skin rashes, skin irritation, watery eyes, runny nose, and sneezing. More severe reactions, though less common, include blisters, coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing, and chest tightness.

Tussockosis severity may vary between individuals, by the amount of exposure, and the level of the outbreak. Everyone should avoid touching or handling this insect. If contact does occur, immediately wash the area of exposure. If symptoms become severe or problematic, immediately seek medical care.

Information courtesy of the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS). USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

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