

*Minister warns of increase in number of trees felled illegally*  
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Counties Cork, Wexford and Galway are the areas where most trees were illegally felled this year.

The problem of cutting down trees without a licence has been growing in recent years to such an extent that a public warning has been issued by the Department of Forestry.

It said yesterday the number of illegal fellings was only six in 1989, but this rose to 60 last year. So far this year there have been 52 cases.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture John Browne yesterday warned it was illegal to uproot any tree over 10 years old or cut down any tree without a licence.

"In 1989, the number of reported illegal felling cases was six. By 2002 this number had risen to 73.

"The figure for 2003 was 62, and for 2004 60. There have been 52 cases in the current year to date."

Mr Browne said many of the cases coming to the notice of his officials this year involved the small-scale felling of trees by farmers and developers.

He said general felling licences were required for large-scale forestry clearance, but a limited felling licence was required for small forest blocks, single lines or even single trees.

He said penalties for illegal felling ranged from fines of up to a maximum of €63.49 per tree to imprisonment for up to two years. In addition to any fine, the Minister may order a person convicted to replant.

Figures released by the department on breaches of the law this year showed: Cork (10); Wexford (5); Galway (5); Clare (4); Westmeath (4); Kerry (4); Donegal (3); Wicklow (3); Limerick (3); Dublin (2); Kildare (2); Meath (2); Waterford (2); Leitrim (1); Mayo (1); and Monaghan (1).

The prohibition on the uprooting or cutting down of trees does not apply where:

- a) it is a hazel, apple, plum, damson, pear or cherry tree grown for the value of its fruit;
- b) it is less than 30.5m (100ft) from a dwelling other than a wall or temporary structure; or
- c) it is standing in a county or other borough or an urban district.

Exceptions apply for road construction, road safety and for electricity supply.