



Combating Introduction of Invasive Species in Hawaii and Noncontiguous U.S. Territories

October 13, 2021

Fiscal Year 2021 Report to Congress



**Homeland
Security**

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Message from the Acting Deputy Commissioner of CBP

October 13, 2021

I am pleased to submit the following report, “Combating Introduction of Invasive Species in Hawaii and Noncontiguous U.S. Territories,” which was prepared by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

The report was compiled pursuant to direction set forth in House Report 116-458, which accompanies the Fiscal Year 2021 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-260). It provides CBP’s recommendations for preventing the introduction of invasive species to noncontiguous U.S. jurisdictions.



Pursuant to congressional requirements, this report is being provided to the following Members of Congress:

The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
Chairwoman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

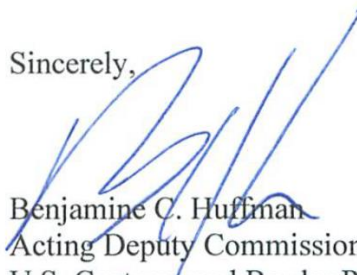
The Honorable Chuck Fleischmann
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Chris Murphy
Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact my office at (202) 344-2001.

Sincerely,


Benjamin C. Huffman
Acting Deputy Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Executive Summary

Invasive species are plants, animals, and other organisms that are nonnative to an ecosystem. They can be introduced to an area by various trade conveyances and the traveling public. Human activity is the primary means of invasive species introductions.¹ Invasive species can create significant economic and environmental harm to the new area that they invade. Threats to U.S. agriculture often are thought of as invasive pests and diseases that are introduced by imported cargo. However, conveyances such as commercial or passenger vehicles are pathways for invasive pests and diseases as well. Several types of contaminants might be spread by conveyances. By engaging trade groups and by providing methods and techniques that reduce contaminants in conveyances, CBP works diligently to combat the introduction of invasive species.

¹ Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Invasive Species Information Center.



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Table of Contents

| | | |
|------|---|---|
| I. | Legislative Language | 1 |
| II. | Background | 2 |
| III. | Discussion | 3 |
| A. | Roles and Responsibilities of CBP | 3 |
| 1. | Hawaii | 3 |
| | Inspection and Regulation at POEs | 3 |
| | Targeting | 3 |
| | Facilitating and Coordinating Pest Risk Committee Functions | 3 |
| | Conducting Special Operations | 4 |
| | Training | 4 |
| | Outreach/Information Sharing | 4 |
| 2. | Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) | 4 |
| | Inspection and Regulation at POEs | 4 |
| | Targeting | 5 |
| | Facilitating and Coordinating Pest Risk Committee Functions | 5 |
| | Conducting Special Operations | 5 |
| | Training | 5 |
| | Outreach/Information Sharing | 5 |
| IV. | Conclusion | 8 |
| | Appendix: List of Abbreviations | 9 |

I. Legislative Language

This document was compiled pursuant to direction set forth in House Report 116-458, which accompanies the Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 116-260) and states:

The Committee is concerned by the continued introduction of invasive species to Hawai'i and to non-contiguous U.S. territories. The Committee directs CBP to consult with the Department of Agriculture and other state and local partners to better prevent the introduction of invasive species to these locations, and to provide a report to the Committee not later than 180 days after the date of enactment of this Act on recommendations for preventing the introduction of invasive species to these non-contiguous jurisdictions.

II. Background

Efforts to address invasive species require a wide range of coordination and engagement by federal, state, tribal, and local governments. In addition, environmental groups and the private sector play a significant role in combating the introduction and subsequent establishment of invasive species.

Executive Order 13112, signed by President Clinton on February 3, 1999, established the National Invasive Species Council. The council is an interdepartmental body that helps to coordinate and ensure complementary, cost-effective federal activities regarding invasive species. The duty of the council is to provide the high-level vision and leadership necessary to sustain and expand federal efforts to safeguard interests of the United States by preventing, eradicating, and controlling invasive species, as well as by restoring ecosystems and other assets affected by invasive species.²

DHS is among 13 U.S. Government agencies that are members of the National Invasive Species Council. Under DHS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) are agencies that are involved in preventing the introduction of invasive species. CBP enforces trade laws and regulations on behalf of 47 federal entities and works closely with DHS partners, as well as with other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and Food Safety and Inspection Service, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). CBP also collaborates with HHS's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of the Interior's (DOI) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Agriculture Programs and Trade Liaison is a directorate within CBP's Office of Field Operations that facilitates inspection, enforcement, targeting, training, and outreach efforts to prevent the introduction of invasive species at U.S. ports of entry (POE). At more than 180 POEs nationwide, CBP agriculture specialists (CBPAS) enforce USDA regulations and carry out inspections.

U.S. territories and islands are valuable centers of biodiversity. Their physical isolation from the continental mainland and local evolutionary adaptation has led to the development of unique biotas. Island ecosystems are particularly vulnerable to invasive species because they tend to host many endemic or native species that evolved in the absence of large predator populations. The invasive species that already have been introduced intentionally and unintentionally in the U.S. territories in the Pacific and the Caribbean are causing species extinction and irreparable damage to natural and cultural resources. Small island nations and territories may be particularly vulnerable to invasive species because of geographic isolation and the presence of native species that are vulnerable to invasive species. If unchecked, invasive species can cause billions of dollars in damage, including the indirect cost of lost revenue to the tourism industry in the territories. Proactive measures to prevent, eradicate, and control invasive species critically are needed.

² Source: U.S. Department of Interior, National Invasive Species Council

III. Discussion

A. Roles and Responsibilities of CBP

1. Hawaii

The San Francisco Field Office oversees the agricultural operations in the Hawaiian Islands and U.S. territories in the region.

Inspection and Regulation at POEs

In addition to detection and targeting capabilities, CBP deploys specialized technology and other resources to screen passengers and cargo to prevent the introduction of harmful plant pests and foreign animal diseases into the United States. Under the San Francisco Field Office, CBPAS assigned in Hawaii carry out conveyance, mail, and passenger inspections to intercept harmful pests and diseases. Table 1 shows CBP’s inspection-related activity in Hawaii from FYs 2018-2020.

| Table 1 | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Hawaii* | | | | |
| | FY 2018 | FY 2019 | FY 2020 | Total |
| Conveyance Inspections | 3,338 | 3,434 | 2,442 | 9,214 |
| Mail Inspections | 38,832 | 20,003 | 12,437 | 71,272 |
| Passenger Inspections | 181,599 | 137,895 | 45,546 | 365,040 |
| Pest Interceptions Submitted | 1,640 | 1,677 | 1,023 | 4,340 |
| Fiscal Year Total | 225,409 | 163,009 | 61,448 | 449,866 |

* Includes Hilo, Honolulu, CBP; Honolulu Sea CBP; Kailua-Kona CBP; and Lihue CBP

Source: USDA, Work Accomplishment Data System

Targeting

CBP’s targeting capabilities and programs are critical aspects of CBP’s ability to identify potentially high-risk shipments or travelers and to intercept agricultural threats effectively and efficiently before they arrive at a POE. Shipments referred by the National Agriculture Cargo Targeting Unit at the ports of the Honolulu Sea cargo branch, Honolulu International Airport cargo, and the Honolulu International Mail Facility resulted in the discovery and quarantine of significant pests and diseases. Local POEs also have the capacity to implement their targeting capability by creating user-defined rules to target shipments and entities of interest.

Facilitating and Coordinating Pest Risk Committee Functions

CBPAS lead Pest Risk Committee meetings and discussions associated with the potential risk of invasive species. They participate as steering members of the Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species. CBPAS also participate on various working groups that include pathway, prevention, eradication, and rapid response. CBP is part of the Hawaii Risk Assessment Committee, which meets quarterly and conducts joint special operations with partner federal and local agencies.

Conducting Special Operations

On the basis of situational and seasonal circumstances, and in coordination with participating government agencies, CBP conducts special operations to mitigate the introduction of invasive species by utilizing inspection techniques honed through experience. Recent operational inspections included targeting metal shipments because of increased pest interceptions on these commodities on the Hawaiian mainland. Once per month, CBPAS conduct inspections at the International Mail Branch and carry out periodic inspections of airline crew members for prohibited agricultural items.

Training

In collaboration with USDA Plant Protection and Quarantine pest identifiers, CBPAS participate in regular training to detect and identify emerging pests and diseases. They also participate in seminars, webinars, and virtual meetings. Continued and regular training also is provided to improve inspection techniques. As part of the national training initiative, CBPAS at Hawaiian POEs participated in federal noxious weed training that shared best practices in identification, inspection, and taking appropriate regulatory actions. CBPAS also receive training from the National Agriculture Cargo Targeting Unit, which includes vessel targeting and notification to identify high-risk vessels for referral and inspection.

Outreach/Information Sharing

CBP Hawaii engages in outreach and information-sharing regarding the threat that invasive species pose to the local economy, as well as to the continental United States. CBPAS participate at events that bring together delegates from Pacific Island nations to provide awareness and outreach about invasive species. CBP Hawaii conducts regular conference calls with carriers and international mail facilities to discuss procedures for agriculture inspections of federal noxious weeds, insects, and hitchhikers on conveyances. Port visits and CBP agriculture canine outreach to schools and organizations also are provided regularly.

2. Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI)

The San Juan Field Office leads the agriculture mission in Puerto Rico and USVI. Table 2 shows CBP's inspection-related activity in Puerto Rico and the USVI from FYs 2018-2020.

Inspection and Regulation at POEs

| Table 2 | | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| San Juan* | | | | |
| | FY 2018 | FY 2019 | FY 2020 | Total |
| Conveyance Inspections | 22,188 | 29,589 | 19,500 | 71,277 |
| Mail Inspections | 182 | 57,537 | 6,892 | 64,611 |
| Passenger Inspections | 174,796 | 224,745 | 114,877 | 514,418 |
| Pest Interceptions Submitted | 1,903 | 2,792 | 2,383 | 7,078 |
| Fiscal Year Total | 199,069 | 314,663 | 143,652 | 657,384 |

* Includes CBP POEs in Puerto Rico and USVI

Source: USDA, Work Accomplishment Data System

Targeting

Aside from targeting shipments for regulated cargo, additional operational activities are performed at POEs to mitigate potential threats from invasive species. CBPAS also target general cargo and empty containers for “hitchhiking” pests. CBPAS utilize the CBP Form AI-288 Ship Inspection Reports, vessel risk list, and automated targeting vessel tracker systems to assess arriving vessels for agricultural quarantine risk. Risk factors may include prior violations and/or the presence of Asian gypsy moths, regulated garbage, khapra beetles, sealable fruit fly host material, etc.

CBPAS assigned at POEs in Puerto Rico and USVI participate in national team targeting calls. These calls are pathway-specific (Express Consignment/International Mail, air/maritime cargo, passenger, and vessel) with topics on trends, system updates, National Agriculture Cargo Targeting Unit program updates, and methods to leverage CBP systems to improve agriculture targeting operations. During the calls, real-time agriculture targeting trends and practices are shared nationally. User-defined rules were created to allow targeting specific to POEs in USVI, including targeting shipments transiting U.S. POEs and heading to the islands.

Facilitating and Coordinating Pest Risk Committee Functions

The San Juan CBP Field Office continues to facilitate engagement with the Caribbean Risk Assessment Group to discuss trends and emerging pest threats. The Caribbean Risk Assessment Group is composed of internal and external stakeholders with interest in agriculture and trade. They meet routinely to discuss associated threats and activities.

Conducting Special Operations

On the basis of threat assessment and Pest Risk Committee recommendations, special operations are conducted to ensure that invasive species are not arriving via the Express Consignment pathway. These activities have resulted in an increase of emergency action notifications for that pathway. Similar special operations are carried out to determine carrier and importer compliance related to correct package descriptions on manifests and on notices of arrival, respectively. As part of special operations, CBPAS perform inspections on all foreign origin-regulated maritime and air cargo, which has resulted in increased pest interceptions, including actionable pests and issued reports of violation for unmanifested and concealed commodities. Other special operations also are carried out to monitor and enforce regulated garbage compliance at private vessels and marinas, resulting in the issuance of penalties for regulated garbage violations. CBP Puerto Rico and USVI delivers outreach regularly via press releases and via training of marina staff.

Training

CBPAS regularly participate in Automated Targeting System trainings/webinars hosted by CBP’s Cargo Analysis Targeting Unit. During FY 2020, training was delivered to CBPAS on the Agriculture Programs and Trade Liaison Dashboard and on CBP’s Automated Targeting System for import cargo and import targeting (user-defined rules) platforms.

Outreach/Information Sharing

CBPAS collaborate with the USVI Department of Agriculture state survey coordinator. With other government agencies, they have conducted joint inspections on the exterior of containers

arriving from the Dominican Republic and other countries for the presence of Giant African Snails. CBPAS share relevant significant agriculture incident reports with CBP officers, USDA, USFWS, and other local and federal agencies for operational awareness. CBPAS assist USFWS with performing inspections on arriving USFWS-targeted passengers and cargo.

CBP San Juan continues to provide outreach to importers to educate them about agriculture regulations, which has resulted in increased compliance with notice of arrival and assembly for inspection requirements. The outreach cultivated relationships with the USVI Department of Agriculture, as well as its international counterparts (e.g., Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries - Barbuda Affairs, the St. Kitts and Nevis Department of Agriculture, and the Puerto Rico Department of Natural Resources) to promote U.S. agriculture safeguarding measures. CBPAS in USVI collaborate with the Assistant Commissioner of USVI Department of Agriculture to educate new farmers about USDA requirements for importing propagative material that is free and clean of invasive pests and diseases. Interagency collaboration on educating private vessel owners about regulated garbage requirements is provided through social media.

CBPAS from USVI and Puerto Rico participate yearly in the St. Croix Agriculture Expo, which is the largest agricultural and crafts fair in the Caribbean. At the annual Puerto Rico Food and Coffee Expo, CBPAS also participate and provide outreach to importers from foreign countries, including Colombia, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and the British Virgin Islands, among others. Through this engagement, CBPAS educate visitors from the Caribbean and the U.S. mainland on the four risk pathways, which include carriers/conveyance, passenger baggage, international mail, and cargo.

Outreach engagement also involves daily contact with travelers to promote CBP's agriculture mission. Outreach material, such as coloring/activity books, luggage tags, pamphlets, children's sunglasses, pens, pill boxes, and jump drives, are provided to travelers. During baggage inspection, travelers are educated:

- About the importance of agriculture,
- On how to prepare agricultural products for travel such as by drying tea leaves or by freezing commodities, and
- On inspecting for any signs of disease and infestation.

POEs implemented the use of general Agriculture Quarantine Inspection operation business cards for CBPAS during trade engagement to ensure that stakeholders have reliable contact information to ask questions or to report any issues. Carriers also are provided with a suite of educational material created by CBP Agriculture Programs and Trade Liaison; the material includes pest trading cards to educate the supply chain on carrier/conveyance contaminants, Asian gypsy moths, and wood packaging material. CBPAS collaborate with the USVI Professional Charter Association to help to educate all charter and private vessels on regulated garbage regulations.

Ports conduct outreach to United Parcel Service and DHL Express regarding agriculture imports that include invasive species, animal products, and other biologics. CBPAS assigned to the carriers are mustered regularly regarding sudden increases in seed imports from China and the

risks associated with invasive species. CBP produced a field office outreach publication in English and Spanish to inform arriving vessels of regulated garbage regulations and of relevant contacts at U.S. POEs.

IV. Conclusion

Invasive species require ongoing eradication and control efforts from CBP, partnering government agencies, and external trade stakeholders. All organizations will continue to assess the introduction of invasive species into the United States and will develop plans for prevention and/or mitigation, which may include networking, outreach and awareness activities, and mobilization of resources.

Meanwhile, the protection of American agriculture continues to be a top priority for CBP. CBP will strengthen existing national and regional mechanisms or will develop specific initiatives to further this goal.

Appendix: List of Abbreviations

| Abbreviations | Definition |
|----------------------|--|
| CBP | U.S. Customs and Border Protection |
| CBPAS | CBP Agriculture Specialists |
| DHS | Department of Homeland Security |
| DOI | U.S. Department of Interior |
| FY | Fiscal Year |
| HHS | U.S. Department of Health & Human Services |
| POE | Port of Entry |
| USCG | U.S. Coast Guard |
| USDA | U.S. Department of Agriculture |
| USFWS | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service |
| USVI | U.S. Virgin Islands |