

Breadcrumb

1. [Home](#)
2. Print
3. Pdf
4. Node
5. Entity Print

APHIS in Action: Navigating an Ag Clearance Crisis: How Foresight and Collaboration Saved a \$10 Million Shipment

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In the fast-paced world of global trade, quick thinking and solid partnerships can make all the difference. A recent incident with the marine vessel *Regal Bay*—carrying more than 4,500 pallets of fruit into the U.S.—is a perfect example of how strategic-thinking and collaboration can turn a potential costly disaster into a success story.

On Aug. 12, APHIS Plant Safeguarding Specialist David Kleinguenther learned that the cold treatment process aboard the *Regal Bay* had likely failed. The ship, arriving in the Port of Philadelphia, was carrying fruit that must be kept at -0.55 °C for 22 days to meet U.S. import requirements designed to protect against invasive plant pests and diseases. Failure to meet those standards meant the shipment would be rejected at the port, potentially leading to substantial losses.

The cargo, valued at more than \$10 million, could have been headed for spoilage. But, thanks to swift action by Kleinguenther, APHIS officers Kevin O'Connor and Nivaldo Acevedo, and a network of industry partners, that worst-case scenario was avoided.

When the ship arrived, APHIS officers inspected the cold treatment compartments and worked with the Seatrade Shipping Line to trace the failure back to a computer motherboard malfunction. The team immediately went to work to find a way to save the shipment.

APHIS personnel worked with Seatrade Shipping Line and Holt Logistics to identify a nearby terminal with a facility suitable to perform the necessary cold treatment and capable of handling the volume of the fruit shipment. They found the South Port Terminal in Camden, New Jersey, which was just across the water on the Delaware River. Time was of the essence. “Without the fast certification of the South Port Terminal, the entire shipment could have been lost. We had two options: treat onsite or export the shipment,” said John Baker, APHIS Supervisory Officer.



By leveraging the expertise and resources of the shipping company, logistics providers, and APHIS scientists, the team was able to arrange for the cold treatment to take place at a warehouse at the South Port Terminal. The shipping company treated 4,353 pallets there and exported the remainder to Canada. Over the next few weeks, APHIS completed seven cold treatments, meeting all the plant safeguarding requirements.

The collaboration saved the shipment, ensuring a steady supply of fresh fruit in the U.S. market, and protected domestic plants from the threat of invasive plant pests. APHIS' ability to problem solve and pivot in a crisis, backed by strong partnerships in the maritime community, helped the *Regal Bay* overcome what could have been a costly hurdle.

The South Port Terminal is now certified to handle similar cases in the future, ensuring high-quality produce from around the globe can move unimpeded into U.S. markets safely and smoothly.

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