

**Customs and Border Protection  
Laredo Field Office  
Brownsville-Progreso Pest Risk Assessment Committee  
Plant Protection & Quarantine  
PPQ Deputy's Safeguarding Award  
Submission Form**

**1. Name, Address, Organization and Job Title, and Phone Number of Nominee (if a group is being submitted, provide contact information for the entire group and identify the group leader)**

Brownsville-Progreso Pest Risk Assessment Committee  
3300 77/83 S. Expressway Room A 151  
Brownsville, Texas 78521

Anabel B. Unwin, Chief Agriculture Specialist, CBP (Group Leader)  
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Joseph Ramirez- STIC Officer, USDA  
Michael Reyes- ATCET CBP Supervisor  
Gus Gonzalez- ATCET Officer  
Jason Mills- ATCET Officer  
Eddie Gallegos-ATCET Officer  
Michael Bordelon-ATCET Officer  
Nancy Becker, APD Trade, CBP  
Alejandro Garza, Agriculture Specialist – CBP/Progreso, Texas  
Isaac Ascencio, Agriculture Specialist – CBP/Progreso, Texas

**2. Describe the action that enhanced safeguarding.**

The Brownsville-Progreso Pest Risk Assessment Committee had assessed that the railroad pathway is an under examined avenue for pest introduction into the American Agriculture industries and American food supply. Two special operations, Operation “Fresh Eyes” and “Rail Blitz”, were conducted to demonstrate the level of compliance by companies under compliance agreement with Customs & Border Protection. The operational protocol involved going behind the Compliance Company after their initial inspection to determine the quality of their work. All incoming trains from Mexico during the operation were examined 100%, and all railcars found non-compliant were returned to Mexico under the authority of Emergency Action Notices. The types of non-compliance found were soil contamination, animal products & by-products, garbage waste, and wood packing material violations to name a few. For situations of gross

neglect by the company under compliance agreement with CBP PPQ518s, Notice of Violation, were issued.

### **3. How did the action enhance safeguarding?**

The actions and results of both operations demonstrated that there was gross neglect in the quality of work that the compliance company was performing. In Operation Fresh Eyes alone it was found over the 3 days of the operation that 89 railcars were found to be non-compliant. When compared to all of FY07, it was revealed that the compliance company found only 59 cars that were non-compliant. After finding a high percentage of non-compliant railcars the Brownsville Progreso PRAC performed outreach and extensive refresher training to all parties involved in the US and Mexico to include the rail companies, cleaning company in Mexico, and the company under compliance with CBP. The number of random rail compliance exams was also increased to constantly monitor and correct if needed the work performed by compliance agreement.

### **4. How does it demonstrate innovation or initiative?**

While, traditionally thought of as low risk, we have demonstrated that the work entrusted to the rail companies under compliance is not being performed. We have tried to further the goal of safeguarding Agriculture by bringing this pathway to the forefront and made significant efforts to correct gross deficiencies. According to USDA-IES Investigator Kelm, the port of Brownsville is one of the few ports in the nation that has issued PPQ518s to a rail compliance company. Due to the number of PPQ518s issued the U.S. Attorney General has established a case against the rail company that is currently undergoing.

### **5. Which of the four areas of the Safeguarding Review does the activity support? Check one:**

- Gathering and use of international information about pests/pathways
- Exclusion
- Pest Detection and Response
- Permits (managing the movement of pests through permit systems)

### **6. What recommendation or safeguarding principle does the action support? Cite a specific recommendation from the review or the principle reflected in a recommendation or series of recommendations.**

This initiative supports recommendations E17, E74 and E78 of the “Safeguarding American Plant Resources Review” (July 1999). The port and its personnel, in cooperation with USDA, have embraced the pest risk assessment process (E17) and continue to reevaluate the threat associated with the different pathways including rail (E78).

Through monitoring and the enforcement of the existing compliance agreement, the carrier is required to meet USDA entry requirements in all railcars including empty ones (E-74).

The Pest Risk Committee recommended increasing the number and frequency of railroad compliance checks by CBP Agriculture Specialists to include random days, weekends, and holidays. It was also recommended that if further non-compliance continues by the compliance company, that the Compliance Agreement be revoked. All of the recommendations support the safeguarding principle in that they are meant to ensure the pest risk to US agriculture is minimized as much as possible. These events have led to higher management officials from the rail companies to become directly involved with everyday operations and increased the level of communications. Various conference calls and meetings have been established to address the non-compliance issues. The rail company is resolved to make any adjustments necessary to be compliant.

**7. Provide any information that demonstrates the outcome/success of the activity.**

Due to outreach that the Brownsville Progreso PRAC performed, the compliance companies are aware of the significance of the impact that an introduced pest/animal disease via the rail pathway can have on the US agriculture industry and are committed to make the necessary changes to minimize the introductions of pest and/or animal diseases into the United States of America.