

2011 Deputy Administrator's Safeguarding Award: Offshore Pest Information System Pest List Project

The Offshore Pest Information System (OPIS) Pest List Project developed guidelines for using transparent and scientific pest evaluation and ranking methods, then convened 16 groups of multidisciplinary technical and regulatory experts to compile a Web-based list of the most significant foreign plant pests and diseases that threaten U.S. agriculture and natural resources. The OPIS Pest List enhances PPQ's safeguarding by allowing more than 1,200 stakeholders from federal and state government agencies and other key cooperators to better focus limited resources on pest exclusion efforts. The OPIS Pest List particularly enhances PPQ's pest exclusion and preparedness activities where knowledge of a pest and communication of its risks are necessary to inform decision-making and develop strategies to prevent or reduce the risk of introducing that pest into the United States.

The project demonstrated innovation and initiative, for it convened 16 groups of multidisciplinary technical and regulatory experts from various sections of PPQ, the U.S. Forest Service, the Agricultural Research Service, and several universities to examine hundreds of plant pests and diseases. Those 16 groups—no other APHIS pest list has used so many teams of experts—compiled and ranked a Web-based list of the most significant plant health threats from foreign countries. This effort required initiative to rank taxonomic groups, whether bacteria or insects, with one standard set of criteria. Experts sorted through technical information, compiled biological data, and applied this knowledge to possible establishment scenarios.

The project went above and beyond expectations. With time constraints and lack of travel funds or staff to work on the project full-time, the project's leaders relied on the collective expertise of nationally recognized technical and regulatory officials to maximize the number of species ranked on the list and the number of experts helping with the project. The project also displayed common sense and ingenuity by:

- applying transparent and standardized scientific criteria to evaluate and rank taxonomic groups on the list;
- using valuable in-house technical and regulatory resources within PPQ, as well as specialists from universities in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area; and,
- Identifying and prioritizing those species that pose the most serious threats so that PPQ and stakeholders can better focus limited resources on pest exclusion efforts.

The OPIS Pest List now allows more than 1,200 stakeholders to use various strategies to focus their pest exclusion efforts. Such strategies include:

- identifying target pests for domestic surveys, preclearance programs, offshore pest surveys, or U.S. border inspections by PPQ and U.S. Customs and Border Protection;
- evaluating pest information and interception data for: the National Agricultural Cargo Release Program; trend and pathway analysis; Not Authorized Pending Pest Risk

Assessment (NAPPRA); and risk assessments before importing specific commodities to determine measures to take at the country of origin or at our borders

- developing regional pest focus and other priorities overseas, as listed in OPIP Guidelines for the Caribbean; South America; Africa; Europe; the Middle East; and the Asia-Pacific Region
- selecting pests to include in a DNA library for molecular diagnosis (bar code projects)

Recent examples of APHIS actions based on OPIS-reported information include the development of domestic survey plans for the Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey Program and import regulations to prevent the introduction of harmful pests of palm trees, horse chestnuts, and tomato plants. The OPIS Pest List is an achievement that will affect many activities in APHIS, where pest ranking or pest exclusion strategies must be evaluated.

OPIS Pest List Team

Project Leader: Parul Patel, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs

Co-Leader: Steve Crook, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs

Teams were supported by:

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- Barney Caton, APHIS-PPQ, Center for Plant Health Science and Technology
- Yanira Ephraim, APHIS-PPQ Plant Health Programs (Student Intern)

Fruit Flies

- Charles (Ed) Miller, Senior Risk Analyst, APHIS-Program, Planning and Development (PPD) (Retired)
- Wayne Burnett, National Fruit Fly Coordinator, APHIS-PPQ, Emergency and Domestic Programs
- Walt Gould, Senior Entomologist, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Mike Hennessey, National Science Program Leader, APHIS-PPQ, Center for Plant Health Science and Technology

Weeds

- Larry Fowler, Botanist, APHIS-PPQ, Center for Plant Health Science and Technology
- AI Tasker, Noxious Weeds Program Manager, APHIS-PPQ, Emergency and Domestic Programs
- Indira Singh, Botany Identifier, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Kelsey Branch, Agriculturist, APHIS-PPQ, Emergency and Domestic Programs

Mites

- Steve Crook, Agriculturist, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Ron Ochoa, USDA-Agricultural Research Service
- Frank Salantri, Entomology Identifier, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Eric McDonald, Entomology Identifier, APHIS-PPQ, Western Region

Forest Pests

- Joe Cavey, Branch Chief, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Bob Rabaglia, USDA-Forest Service, Forest Health Protection
- Vic Mastro, Otis Lab Director, APHIS-PPQ, Center for Plant Health Science and Technology
- Charles (Ed) Miller, Senior Risk Analysts, USDA-APHIS- Program, Policy and Development (Retired)

Nematodes

- Steve Crook, Agriculturist, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
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- David Chitwood, USDA-Agricultural Research Service
- Russ Bulluck, National Science Program Leader, APHIS-PPQ, Center for Plant Health Science and Technology

Bacteria

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- Scott Redlin, APHIS-PPQ, Center for Plant Health Science and Technology
- Lisa Ferguson, APHIS-PPQ, Center for Plant Health Science and Technology

Fungi

- Gloria Abad, Senior Plant Pathologist, APHIS-PPQ, Center for Plant Health Science and Technology
- Carissa Marassas, Risk Manager, APHIS-PPQ
- John McKemy, National Mycologist, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Joe Bischoff, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Patricia de Sa Snow, Molecular Biologist, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Jose Hernandez, Risk Manager, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs

Viruses

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- Ed Podleckis, Senior Risk Analyst, APHIS-Program, Policy and Development
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- Clarissa Maroon-Lango, Lead Plant Pathologist, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Margarita Licha, Lead Plant Pathologist, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs

Mollusks

- Chuck Schwalbe, APHIS-PPQ (Retired)
- David Robinson, National Malacology Specialist, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Carmen Soileau, Senior Entomologist, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Fred Zimmerman, Malacology Identifier, APHIS-PPQ, Eastern Region
- Suzette Gomes, Malacology Identifier, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- John Slapcinsky, University of Florida, Cooperator

Lepidoptera

- Chuck Schwalbe, APHIS-PPQ (Retired)
- Steven Passoa, National Lepidoptera Specialist, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Todd Gilligan, Colorado State University, Cooperator
- Wayne Wehling, Senior Entomologist, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs

Scales, Mealybugs and Whiteflies

- Charles (Ed) Miller, APHIS-Program, Policy and Development (PPD) (Retired)
- Greg Evans, Entomology Identifier, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Marina Zlotina, Agriculturist, APHIS-PPQ, Center for Plant Health Science and Technology

Miscellaneous Pests

- Chuck Schwalbe, APHIS-PPQ (Retired)
- Allison Neeley, Risk Analyst, APHIS-PPQ, Center for Plant Health Science and Technology
- Keith Colpetzer, Program Manager, APHIS-PPQ, Eastern Region
- Tad Dobbs, Entomology Identifier, APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs

Phytoplasmas

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- Ed Podleckis, Senior Risk Analyst, APHIS-Program Policy and Development
- Bob Davis, USDA-Agricultural Research Service
- John Rascoe, Molecular Biologist, APHIS-PPQ, Center for Plant Health Science and Technology

Bee Pests and Diseases

- Colin Stewart, Senior Entomologist, USDA-APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs
- Wayne Wehling, Senior Entomologist, USDA-APHIS-PPQ, Plant Health Programs