Plant Protection & Quarantine
Deputy Administrator's Safeguarding Award

Background and Criteria

The PPQ Deputy Administrator's Safeguarding Award is given in recognition of initiatives and innovations that make significant contributions to furthering the goal of safeguarding American agriculture and plant resources. The Deputy will recognize nominations that (1) establish a new process, operation, procedure, or policy that contributes directly or indirectly to safeguarding or (2) significantly improves an existing process, operation, procedure, or policy that contributes directly or indirectly to safeguarding. The nomination should demonstrate initiative or innovation and show a definable result. Each nomination should contain information linking the action to a specific principle or recommendation in the Safeguarding Review, and it should address one of the four principle areas contained in the Safeguarding Review:

- permits to control the movement of pests
- the collection and use of information about pests throughout the world
- pest detection and response
- exclusion of pests (including offshore mitigation)

Submission of Nominations

Nominations should be submitted on the attached form to Paula Henstridge at 302-E J.L Whitten Building, 14th & Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, DC 20250. They may also be e-mailed to Paula.Henstridge@aphis.usda.gov or faxed to her at (202) 720-8535. Nominations may also be submitted through your State Plant Health Director. Please submit all nominations by the end of each quarter of the fiscal year (December 31, March 31, June 30, and September 30).

Please note that potential nominees are not limited to PPQ employees.

Selection of Award Recipient(s)

Nominations for the Deputy's Safeguarding Award will be reviewed by the Safeguarding Steering Committee, which will forward its ranking to the Deputy for final consideration. The individual or group selected for recognition will receive a trophy and a small medal. The winner's name and achievement will also be inscribed on a plaque to be displayed in the Deputy Administrator's Office as the Deputy's "wall of fame." Achievements will also be noted on the Safeguarding website and through other appropriate mechanisms.

PPQ Deputy's Safeguarding Award
Submission Form

1. Name, Address, Job Title, and Phone Number of Nominee (if a group is being submitted, provide the contact information for the group leader and the names and affiliation of all members of the group)

The brainchild of the Miami Maritime Port Director for Customs and Border Protection, Jose S. Ramirez, the Miami Maritime Post Interdiction Committee was created in 2004. Representatives include CBP managers, CBP Agriculture Specialists, CBP Field Analysis Specialist, the USDA, APHIS, PPQ Identifier, Florida State Operations Support Officer and SIT-C.

The following is a list of the current permanent Post interdiction Committee members:

Jose S. Ramirez, Miami Maritime Port Director, Customs and Border Protection
Gerard Russo, Chairperson, Chief, Agriculture Specialist, Customs and Border Protection
Martha Lorenzo, Agriculture Specialist, Customs and Border Protection
Robin Schmaltz, Supervisor, Customs and Border Protection
William Tang, Entomology and Malacology Identifier, USDA, APHIS, PPQ
Julie Aliaga, State Operations Support Officer, USDA, APHIS, PPQ
Camille Morris, SIT-C Supervisor, USDA, APHIS, PPQ

In addition, we have support members and individuals who provided assistance and resources for Post Interdiction Committee project requests:

John Casale, Chief Inspector, Trade Operations, Customs and Border Protection
Grethell Gomez, Field Analysis Specialist, Customs and Border Protection
Genoveva Pereira-Davis, Agriculture Specialist, Customs and Border Protection
Paul Douglas Barker, Agriculture Specialist, Customs and Border Protection
Esther Ramirez, Senior Inspector, Problem Resolution, Customs and Border Protection
Jose A. Lorenzo, Agriculture Specialist, Customs and Border Protection

The Post Interdiction Committee would also like to recognize the leadership of Thomas Winkowski, Director, Field Operations who continues to demonstrate his unconditional support in safeguarding the homeland from invasive pests and diseases.

2. Describe the action that enhanced safeguarding.

The Miami Post Interdiction Committee promotes and encourages the use of risk-based decision making with regard to policies affecting all CBP agriculture inspectional activities within the Port of Miami. The Post Interdiction Committee endeavors to employ transparent, scientifically sound methodologies as well as intelligence gathering reports in order to ensure that local targeting and inspectional polices reflect current risk levels.

The objectives of the Post Interdiction Committee is as follows:

1. To categorize all Agricultural Quarantine Inspection (AQI) activities in the Miami seaport as high, medium or low risk.

2. To establish resource levels appropriate for each designated level of risk/program activity, and to recommend how and when those resources will be deployed.

3. To obtain enhanced data on shipments to improve targeting in order to ensure national security issues are being addressed.

4. To provide avenues for risk communication among the PIC, CBP employees and other interested parties as determined by the PIC.

5. To identify and interdict potentially high risk cargo which pose a significant threat to America's agricultural and natural resources.

6. To provide technical advice and direction to the Customs Enforcement Team, Trade, and CBP Risk Management Teams in the Port of Miami.

The Miami Post Interdiction Committee to its credit, it has completed three major projects: The Most Wanted Agricultural Pest Poster, Operation "Bug Off" and the analysis document entitled "*Tendency of the Effect of Temperatures in the Mediterranean Zone and the Amount of Pests Intercepted at the Miami Seaport*". The committee is currently working on its fourth major project "Operation June Bug".

A. The Most Wanted Agricultural Pest Poster

The basis for pest exclusion in Customs and Border Protection involves widespread acceptance by our employees of the concepts of protecting our agricultural and natural resources. All of our employees are aware that requirements exist for the importation of agricultural commodities into the United States but are unaware of the pest associated with the potential introduction of harmful pests and diseases. In response to this, a request was made by CBP Port Director, Jose Ramirez to PPQ Entomologist William Tang to design a Most Wanted Poster each month to be disseminated to all CBP employees. The poster includes the name, description, origin and host material of a pest or disease which may pose an immediate threat to the United States. This proactive approach has proven effective in educating legacy customs and immigration officer of the risks associated with invasive species.

B. Operation "Bug Off"

North American Plant Resources and especially plant resources within the State of Florida are highly vulnerable to the impacts of invasive plant pests and weed species, resulting in dramatic

economic and environmental effects. Introduced invasive plant pests result in an estimated $41 billion annually in lost production and in prevention and control and eradication expenses (GAO Report, 1997).

Ceramic and marble tile imported from Italy has been identified as a major pathway for quarantine pests entering the United States. Tile containers are a major source of interceptions, yielding over 544 quarantine pests in 2003. More than 23,000 containers of Mediterranean tile were imported into the United States through the Port of Miami in fiscal year 2003, with the majority of tile imports arriving from Italy. In volume, Italian tile (stone, marble slabs, worked monument or building, ceramic glazed, tiles cubes other stone, travertine, bricks, clay) represents one of the largest categories of cargo at the maritime work unit, easily surpassing the number of regulated perishable commodities.

In 2002, the USDA's International Services and Plant Protection and Quarantine began working with the Italian Quarantine Service and the Ceramic tile Manufacturers Association to develop measures that reduce the pest risk associated with tile shipments. A small number of tile manufacturers changed their procedures for storage and packing in order to mitigate the number of pests intercepted in their shipments. However CBP Agriculture Specialists continue to intercept a large number of pests on Italian tile, with tile pests being six of the most commonly intercepted pests last year in the Port of Miami. It is important to note that mollusks continue to make up a large fraction of the actionable pests at the maritime work unit (29%), and Mediterranean snails on tile continue to be one on the most serious pest pathways into Florida.

In March 2004, Customs and Border Protection Post Interdiction Committee initiated "Operation Bug Off" to survey, identify and measure the pest risk associated with tile arriving from Italy. In order to identify potentially risk cargo and to obtain data, a Trade Enforcement Strategy (TES was utilized to calculate a sample size for the study. This methodology produced statistically valid estimates and conducted statistically valid samples of the results. This information gathered from the exams was recorded in a database. Upon completion of the TES project, the data was analyzed and it will assist in the efficient future targeting of merchandise to prevent the introduction of high-risk pests into South Florida. The project was designed to specifically address the following questions:

* Do discrepancies originate from a particular manufacture, exporter, and importer?

* Can the cargo selectivity criteria be narrowed down to specific HTS Headings?

* What type of pests are we finding, where in the container is the pest found, and what are the environmental conditions inside the container?

* Do seasons and metrology play into the discrepancy rates?

C. Tendency of the Effect of Temperatures in the Mediterranean Zone and the Amount of Pests Intercepted at the Miami Seaport.

Each year, the number of actionable plant pests intercepted in tile containers from the Mediterranean, drops significantly in June, July, August and September. The summer of 2003 in particular, posted a sharp decline over previous years. The Miami Post Interdiction Committee recognized that a heat wave affected much of Europe with daily temperatures between 90-99 degrees Fahrenheit across many areas from France and Switzerland southeastward across the Mediterranean region. New analyses of proxy data for the northern Hemisphere indicate that the increase in temperature in the 20th century is likely to have been the largest of any century during the past 1000 years and this warming effect has continued into the new millennium. Could there be a correlation between temperature and the amount of pests being intercepted throughout the year?

A study was initiated by the Miami Post Interdiction Committee. Data of monthly average T Fahrenheit for 33 cities was collected for 33 cities in Europe and around the Mediterranean Sea in order to draw Isothermal Maps, evaluate the range of temperatures in the area from January to December, and the processing of the number of actionable pests intercepted in Miami during the five year period (1999-2003).

Our analyses indicates that the increase in temperature reflects a decrease in the number of plant pest interceptions, thus the cooler months will be most favorable for the introduction exotic pest species.

3. How did the action enhance safeguarding?

A. The Most Wanted Poster

Pest exclusion at the ports of entry involves widespread acceptance by CBP employees of the concepts of protecting our agricultural and natural resources. CBP employees are aware that USDA regulations exist and enforced by CBP Agriculture Specialists, however they were not aware of the risks associated with violations of these rules. The impact of invasive plant pests entering the United States extends beyond agriculture to public health and the disruption of natural ecosystems wherein native flora and fauna is adversely affected. Making all CBP employees aware of these risks associated with potential introductions of exotic pests and diseases by disseminating the Most Wanted Poster each month can help in the overall effort of pest exclusion.

B. Operation "Bug Off"

The majority of the positive interceptions utilized the palletized cargo and plastic wrapping as the packing materials, creating favorable hitchhiking conditions for the pests. Commodities that utilized such methods of packing will be identified for future targeting purposes.

The pests were found in the front and midway section of the container. This indicates that in some cases, a tailgate inspection is not sufficient in order to find the pests.

Based on the findings, the commodities that are conducive to the transportation and introduction of pests into South Florida from Italy have been identified. Harmonized Tariff Schedule's Heading 6802 and 6908 (stone, travertine, ceramic glazed tiles, cubes and similar articles). Operation "June Bug", which targets these commodities specifically, was initiated on June 1, 2004. It concluded on June 30, 2004. We are in the process of analyzing the gather data from the exam findings and a report will be issued in August 2004.

Informed Compliance meetings with all the importers that had positive interceptions will be taking place shortly and we will continue to monitor the imports from these companies.

Importers need to communicate to their manufacturers the importance to keep pallets and tiles free from an environment which is conducive to pest contamination. Pest mitigation at the point of origin is the most viable approach to pest exclusion and mitigation.

Utilizing the same methodology, similar commodities will be targeted from other source countries.

C. Tendency of the Effect of Temperatures in the Mediterranean Zone and the Amount of Pests Intercepted at the Miami Seaport.

Of all meteorological elements, temperature and decreased precipitation may be the most important factors that influences the interception of exotic plant pests from the Mediterranean The direct correlation between increased temperature/decreased rainfall and Mediterranean pest interceptions is documented in the Post Interdiction Committee analysis paper entitled "*Tendency of the Effect of Temperatures in the Mediterranean Zone and the Amount of Pests Intercepted at the Miami Seaport*".

Thus environmental factors such as cool temperatures, which are conducive to the transportation and introduction of exotic plant pests into South Florida have been identified. This will allow for the efficient targeting of commodities and the realignment of CBP Agricultural Specialists to prevent the introduction of non-indigenous organisms into South Florida.

4. How does it demonstrate innovation or initiative?

The Post Interdiction Committee was created to promote and encourage the use of risk-based decision making with regard to policies and procedures affecting CBP inspectional activities and to increase the efficacy of our safeguarding efforts at the Miami seaport. It utilizes the talents and expertise of employees from both the USDA and CBP to identify potentially high risk cargo

which poses a significant threat to America's agricultural resources. The PIC's Operation "Bug Off" for example has provided enhanced data and information on manufacturers and Harmonized Tariff Schedule Headings which has enabled us to improve targeting with respect to commodities arriving from the Mediterranean. This initiative ensures effective and efficient use of staffing and resources by unifying a multi-discipline workforce of CBP Agricultural Specialists, Trade Team Officers, Selectivity Officers, Field Analysis Specialists.

5. Which of the four areas of the Safeguarding Review does the activity support?

Pest Exclusion.

Categorizing all Agricultural Quarantine Inspection activities in the port as high, medium or low risk, obtaining enhanced data and information on imports to improve targeting, providing avenues for risk communication between the Post Interdiction Committee and CBP employees, and employing transparent, scientifically sound methodologies as well as intelligence gathering reports in order to ensure that local targeting and inspectional policies reflect current risk levels.

6. What recommendation or safeguarding principle does the action support?

* Implement the use of "smart" x-ray equipment, as it becomes commercially available.

* Develop and foster close and effective working relationships with other Federal inspection agencies.

* Support and encourage training for use of and access to Customs databases.

* Negotiate with Customs to use its truck x-ray capability to screen cargo containers.

* Provide ongoing staff training in quarantine laws and regulations, computer and equipment use, and data and risk management and education on the impacts of invasive pests.

* Redefine quarantine material interceptions to include country of origin pest risks and commodity volume.

The Miami Post Interdiction Committee employees scientifically sound methodologies, x-ray application, as well as intelligence gathering systems in order to ensure that local targeting and inspectional policies reflect current risk levels in our pest exclusion efforts.

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

Ceramic and marble tile imported from Italy has been identified as a major pathway for quarantine significant pests entering the Miami Seaport. Tile containers are a major source of these interceptions, yielding over 544 quarantine pests in 2003.

Mollusks continue to make up a large fraction of actionable pests at the maritime work unit (29%). Mediterranean snails on tile continue to be one of the most serious pest pathways into Florida, threatening both our agricultural and environmental resources.

In January 2004, the CBP Miami Seaport Post Interdiction Committee (PIC) initiated "Operation Bug Off" to quantify the pest risk associated with commodities arriving from Italy.

The Trade Enforcement Strategy (TES) methodology was utilized for the project. This methodology was utilized to produce a statistically valid statement of the examination results. The Operation "Bug Off" TES enabled us to identify four specific HTS headings as well as specific factors such packing materials and seasonality, as having a significant impact on pest interceptions..

A follow-up TES, Operation "June Bug" was commissioned by the Post Interdiction Committee to further refine the four HTS headings to determine specificity to manufacturer and importer.

The PIC also examined the impact of temperature on pest interdictions from the Mediterranean and Europe. Historically, the number of actionable plant pests intercepted in tile containers drops significantly in June, July, August and September. The summer of 2003, in particular, posted the sharpest decline on record.

The Miami Seaport PIC recognized that the summer of 2003 was one of the hottest on record for the Mediterranean. A heat wave affected much of Europe with daily temperatures between 90-99 degrees Fahrenheit across many areas from France and Switzerland southeastward across the Mediterranean region. The direct correlation between increased temperature/decreased rainfall and Mediterranean pest interceptions is clearly defined in the Post Interdiction Committee analysis document entitled "*Tendency of the Effect of Temperatures in the Mediterranean Zone and the Amount of Pests Intercepted at the Miami Seaport*".

In summary, the commodities and environmental factors that are conducive to the transportation and introduction of exotic plant pests into South Florida have been identified. This will allow for the efficient targeting of commodities and the realignment of CBP Agricultural Specialists to prevent the introduction of non-indigenous organisms into South Florida.

The Miami Seaport PIC will be working closely with the USDA to conduct informed compliance in Italy with manufacturers found to be repetitive shippers of snails and other plant pests. CBP Ag. Specialists will work directly with local importers found to have imported multiple infested tile shipments to insure future compliance.

How are we doing? Below is a graph of the number of actionable pests found at Miami Maritime so far this fiscal year compared to the average from FY'01-'03.