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Stink bugs and supply chains



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Some countries are determined to keep stink bugs out and ensure that these dangerous pests do not infiltrate their borders. Native to parts of Eastern Asia (China, Japan, the Korean peninsula and Taiwan), the brown marmorated stink bugs (BMSB or “stink bugs”) are a major agricultural pest and can cause significant damage to plants and crops. The stink bug gets its name from the unpleasant odour it produces when it is threatened.

Various government initiatives around the world have systems in place to try and prevent these pests from entering their agricultural chain.

Stink bugs can now be found in North America after it was thought to have hitched a ride as a stowaway on machinery parts being imported. It has more recently reached parts of Europe and South America. Countries such as Australia and New Zealand are determined to keep the dangerous pests out and are therefore taking a hardline approach to ensuring that stink bugs do not infiltrate their borders.

In November 2018, biosecurity officers in New Zealand turned away “The Carmen,” a vehicle carrier, after discovering 3 live and 39 dead stink bugs on board, upon the vessel’s arrival in Auckland from Europe. The vessel subsequently underwent fogging with insecticide outside New Zealand waters, before returning to discharge its cargo.

Similarly, Australian authorities have recently ordered three vessels, all carrying vehicles and machinery, to leave Australian waters and seek eradication treatment, after discoveries of stink bugs.

Needless to say, once a vessel has been turned away, upon its return after treatment, it will undergo an extensive inspection to ensure that all risks of stink bug contamination have been eliminated.

The Australian and New Zealand Authorities have issued notices to shipping lines, in the last few years, which seek to target ships from particular parts of the world that might be carrying the BMSB or stink bug.

In 2014, their attention was directed at vehicles, vessels and machinery from the USA as BMSB in that place increased. More recently, the focus has been on cargo arriving from European ports. There are established BMSB populations in Northern Italy as well as countries like Switzerland.

The advice handed out by the Australian and New Zealand authorities to try and minimise infested vessels arriving on their shores includes:

- Ensuring that shipping containers are clear of live animals, insects and soil.
- Covering goods during the transport leg from the manufacturer to the loadport.
- Securing potential contamination points e.g. door and window seals where goods are stored or cabins and nooks within the goods themselves.
- Treating target goods prior to loading, using certain treatments.
- Physically segregating treated and untreated break-bulk goods prior to loading as well as segregation on the vessel.
- Using traps to indicate any sign of infestation.

It is essential that shippers are alive to and comply with the strict measures imposed by both Australia and New Zealand when it comes to stink bugs. Despite being small in size, stink bugs can cause massive disruption in the shipping and logistics industry. Biosecurity enforcement measures imposed by both countries have caused severe service disruptions, which have resulted in significant delays and additional costs for cargo carriers and importers alike.

Written by Linda Jacques and Erin Collins