

Internet Trade (e-Commerce) in Plants Potential Phytosanitary Risks

IPPC Secretariat

**International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)
2012**

Scope

- Preliminary findings of a desk study
- Highlight of some potential risks
- Consideration of approaches by previous related studies
- Recommendations



Background

- E-commerce as a pest pathway
- Internet a convenient means for products to bypass the application of phytosanitary measures or scrutiny through PRA
- Few NPPOs factor this pathway into their risk analyses
- No effective mechanism, yet for detecting products sold online with phytosanitary risks

Background/2

- Marketing of plants / plant products online
 - conventional forms e.g. packets of seeds, whole plants, plant parts
 - novelty items e.g. seed infused material such as greeting cards, bookmarks, even footwear! etc.



Shoes infused with seeds

Plantable Seed Paper in Children's Book SEPTEMBER 26, 2011



image from botanicalworks.com

Books infused with seeds

Methodology

- Various categories selected:
 - plants & plant products i.e. plants for planting, novelties, handicrafts
 - insects & other organisms as pets
- Sub-categories of each selection:
 - seeds, bulbs, corms, tubers, cuttings, rootstocks
 - novelty items / ecological products with seed
 - wood carvings
 - pets- insects
 - pests of economically important aquatic plants.



Methodology/2

- Online searches using various key word combinations
- In some instances further searches made using CABI Crop Protection Compendium to
 - determine pests that might ordinarily be associated with the articles of interest & as a matter of curiosity
- No attempt made to conduct PRAs

Results

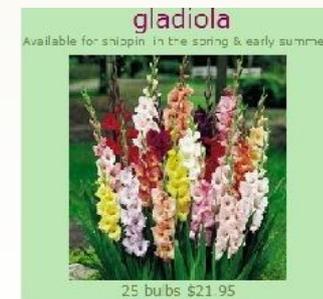
- A large number of websites found that promote the sale & distribution of plants/plant products e.g.
 - seeds (conventional & in novelty items)
 - bulbs, tubers, corms
 - lumber products
 - aquatic plants
 - other organisms – used as biocontrol agents or as pets



grass seed-
fertilizer - mulch
combination



wildflower seed
packets



Gladiolus bulbs

Results/2

- Examples of seeds in conventional form
 - book marks, greeting cards, gift wrappings,
 - foot wear, apparel,
 - packaging material



conventional form



novelty item with seed

Results/3 – Items with seed



Large Plantable Gift Bag With
3.5" Gusset - Seed Paper
(5.75"X11.5")
\$4.85 - \$5.50



Plantable Wine Gift Bag With
3.5" Gusset - Seed Paper
(15"X3.5")
\$4.85 - \$5.50

image from eco-swag.com

Seed infused gift bags



Image from [the Life Box](#)

Seed infused packaging

Results/4

- Other products include
 - articles made of lumber e.g. craft, furniture & planks
 - organisms for “alleged” beneficial purposes
 - Aquatic plant species
 - Butterflies as pets e.g. painted lady (*Cynthia cardui*) and Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*)



Butterflies as pets



Aquatic plants *Eichhornia crassipes* & *Ceratophyllum demersum*



Nerita sp. snail advertised as biocontrol agent of algae in aquaria

Some features

- Generally in small quantities
- A few websites indicate the origin of products
- Fewer provide information on shipping restrictions to certain countries
- Much fewer indicate possible restrictions for their products in destination countries

Key Considerations

Websites largely promote
sale & worldwide
distribution of articles
without warnings on
phytosanitary risks or
notices on requirements for
phytosanitary certification

Perennials

The first year they sleep;
the second year they creep;
the third year they leap.
Author Unknown



Key Considerations

Delivery locations & information!!!!!!! - “.....but, if you need to have something shipped to you while you are in prison, there is detailed information for that as in this example:

- [notable e-commerce site].com delivers to penitentiaries, but we strongly suggest you contact the prison first to confirm that they accept deliveries and to note any special regulations the prison might have.
 - Some prisons don't allow ...
 - Others place a limit on the number of items contained in a package.
 - Because inmates cannot sign for deliveries, packages must be sent via ...

Key Considerations/2

- Drop in the ocean
- The study used English search terms but there is a growing number of non-English language e-commerce sites.
- E-commerce is expanding and might involve greater trade in plant based products
- Many sites visited channel products from vendors to the consumer & are not associated with the production of the items being sold online



Recommendations

- 1. NPPOs to establish mechanisms / procedures to monitor the internet**
 - within the context of conducting PRAs, as well as for general surveillance, to identify potential products of concern that may be imported via this pathway.
- 2. Consideration be given to establishing a monitoring system hosted by the IPPC Secretariat to alert contracting parties of products with potential phytosanitary risks being traded on e-commerce sites**
 - such a system should include provision for information exchange & data sharing among NPPOs.

Recommendations/2

3. **NPPOs to work closely with in-country e-commerce vendors to ensure adequate information and warnings are provided to both the vendors and their customers.**
 - This could involve standardization of labeling, development of standard written warnings, the provision of links to both the relevant NPPO contact point as well as seeking their cooperation to reduce risks (e.g. removal of the products from websites).
 - Contact internet trade groups and on-line fora in order to raise awareness of phytosanitary requirements and risks and to seek their co-operation.
(modified from recommendations of the 22nd TC-RPPOs)

Recommendations/3

4. The IPPC should prepare a recommendation or an ISPM on the advertising / marketing/ distribution/sale of plants, plant products through e-commerce pathways including linking these with e-certification.
5. Raise awareness on risks, e.g. through social networking sites, IPP, NPPOs/RPPOs, etc. (modified from recommendations of the 22nd TC-RPPOs)

Recommendations/4

6. **Enhance NPPO import verification systems including closer scrutiny of packages entering the country,**
 - e.g. using X-ray, establishment of specific fines and penalties in cases of non compliance, co-operation with Customs courier service providers, and restricting the points of entry of the traded products to facilitate inspection.
(modified from recommendations of the 22nd TC-RPPOs)