

## THE CALIFORNIA BORDER AGRICULTURAL INSPECTION STATION SYSTEM

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One of the basic principles for maintaining a healthy and productive agricultural environment is preventing the entry of injurious plant pests into that environment; thus, exclusion of unwanted pests is paramount to California's \$18 billion annual agricultural industry.

Since pests can infest commodities or hitchhike on vehicles entering California via the highways, a system has been developed to monitor and prevent this avenue of entry. The State of California operates 16 border agricultural inspection stations along the major routes entering this State from Arizona, Nevada and Oregon. Inspection station personnel check incoming passenger and commercial vehicle traffic for restricted or prohibited agricultural products and plant pests. Nine of the inspection stations operate on a 24-hour year-round basis on the primary highways (freeways), while the remaining seven stations (located on secondary highways) operate on a modified schedule of 16 hours per day during the colder months, and 24 hours a day during the peak travel months of summer. Because it is an international boundary, the California-Mexico border is monitored by the United States Department of Agriculture with inspection stations located at Calexico, Otay Mesa and San Ysidro. This California system of pest prevention is effective in part due to the unique geographical location of California and the natural buffer zone surrounding this State. The Pacific Ocean to the west, deserts to the east and south and mountain ranges to the north prevent the natural spread of most pests that are of concern to California. However, through commerce and travel by people, there is constant pressure on California to exclude unwanted pests that occur in other parts of the nation and world.

In 1992, almost 27 million vehicles passed through and were inspected by California's border station personnel. This included 22,441,925 automobiles, 3,956,849 commercial trucks, 500,309 recreational vehicles, and 31,625 commercial buses. A total of 4,145 pests were intercepted from these vehicles, including prohibited weed seeds, exotic fruit flies, fire ants, gypsy moths, European corn borers, Japanese beetles, Colorado potato beetles, ferrets, and gerbils.

The extent to which a vehicle is inspected at the California border is determined by the type of vehicle, route of travel, time of year and profile of occupants of the vehicle. In general, the following guidelines are followed for vehicle inspections:

Trucks: Each truck is required to stop at the border station. A truck that is obviously empty and not from an imported fire ant

area is permitted to proceed, and is not included in the truck count. A truck loaded with new lumber, or logs for a local mill (as examples) is usually permitted to proceed without further inspection. Closed trucks are required to produce a manifest of their cargo. If no agricultural commodities are listed, the truck usually is released without further inspection.

Trucked agricultural commodities are checked for proper origin certification or are inspected, as the situation requires. Any cargo that cannot be inspected and released or otherwise cleared by the state inspector, including moving vans of household goods from areas infested with gypsy moth, are sent forward under quarantine to destination county to be inspected by the staff of the agricultural commissioner after unloading. Any cargo failing to meet the plant quarantine requirements or found to be infested with pests is rejected and returned out of state, destroyed, or treated to eliminate the pest risk.

Recreational Vehicles: A recreational vehicle is defined as a mobile home, camper, house trailer, camping trailer, tent trailer, or other vehicle used as living quarters for recreational purposes. Boat, horse, auto, motorcycle, and other trailers are included in this category.

All recreational vehicles with out-of-state license plates and those with California plates that are re-entering the State are stopped and inspected. There is a high incidence of restricted fruit in refrigerators, ice chests, and other cool storage containers associated with such vehicles. The gypsy moth also can be carried on vehicles -- particularly seldom used vehicles stored out of doors in areas where the gypsy moth exists in high numbers.

Automobiles: A higher degree of judgment by the individual inspector is involved in evaluating which automobiles to inspect. In general, all automobiles with out-of-state license plates, as well as California automobiles returning from out-of-state, are stopped and inspected. All cars that are heavily loaded or dirty with road grime are stopped and inspected regardless of license plate. Cars with California, Arizona, Nevada, and Oregon license plates that do not meet the foregoing profile are allowed entry with minimal scrutiny.

Vehicles not stopped and given an in-depth inspection are considered local traffic (includes gamblers, tourists, and vacationers returning to California from adjacent recreational areas). Of the travelers stopped and inspected (and/or interrogated), 55 percent are returning California residents and 45 percent are from out-of-state.

Each of the 16 border inspection stations receives traffic from a different origin, with unique patterns of autos, trucks, and recreational vehicles, as well as different pest risks.

As examples, a station on the northern border rarely

intercepts cotton pests and a station on the southern border rarely intercepts cherry pests. Stations handling grain movements from the midwest will find corn pests and southern stations will find fruit fly pests from central Mexico, Florida and Texas, whereas northern border stations will be most apt to find cherry fruit fly and forest pests such as European pine shoot moth.

Those stations on eastern interstate highways will be intercepting most of the eastern household moves while northern stations will be intercepting many Japanese unshu oranges and exotic fruits that are commonly available in Canada.

In addition to enforcing agricultural quarantines, the border stations work cooperatively with several other branches of the Department, including Fruit and Vegetable Quality Control Standardization, Animal Health, Market News, Egg Quality Control, Feed, Fertilizers, and Livestock Drugs, and Agricultural Statistics. The border stations also cooperate with other federal and state agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Public Utilities Commission, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Parks and Recreation, Fish and Game, Caltrans, Cal/EPA's Department of Pesticide Regulation, Board of Equalization, California Highway Patrol, Conservation, and the Bureau of Land Management.

The Border Agricultural Inspection Station Program is staffed by approximately 140 inspectors and has an annual budget of \$7.8 million. In comparison to the cost of eradicating economic pests once established in California, it is agreed that this program is money well spent and offers a very unique method to protect California's vast agricultural and environmental resources.