

Learning about biosecurity to better protect natural resources



An enormous amount of goods and passengers are regularly transported by air and by sea to, and among, the countries within Micronesia. These countries are considered to be “hot spots” of biodiversity, and therefore, the accidental or deliberate introduction of diseases and/or invasive species (through the movement of people and products) could have an extremely negative impact on these fragile island environments.

To help Micronesian countries prevent the accidental import of invasive species, a special training session is held each year for quarantine and biosecurity officers. This year, the 11th subregional training on “Quarantine and biosecurity for Micronesian countries” was held in Guam. The training was organised by the University of Guam, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the United States Department of Agriculture – Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS), and the Guam Department of Agriculture. The trainings, which specifically target quarantine and biosecurity officers within Micronesia, were initiated in 2002 and have been held on annual basis since then.

This year, 26 quarantine and biosecurity officers from the Commonwealth of the Northern Marian Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru and Palau attended the training. It was the first year that quarantine officers from Kiribati and Nauru participated. Theoretical training sessions were held at the University of Guam, while practical sessions were conducted in various locations, such as the plant inspection facility of USDA-APHIS, the entomology laboratory of the University of Guam, and at rhino beetle eradication and control areas around Guam.

Participants improved their knowledge of major exotic plant pests and animal diseases, and the strategies to control their entrance and spread. Quarantine protocols for plants and terrestrial and aquatic animals were presented. Animal transboundary diseases, major trading partners, agreements and consumer aspirations were also topics covered during the training. One of the

major achievements of this programme is the exchange of ideas and information among quarantine and biosecurity officers. Organisers have noticed that over the years, this training programme has established a large biosecurity “family” within Micronesia, and members are in contact with each other and discuss and help solve problems and learn from each other’s experiences.

The inspection and acceptance of potentially high to medium risk goods within Micronesia are carried out by these well trained quarantine and biosecurity officers. Most Micronesian countries and territories have a good record with regard to plant and animal health (for both terrestrial and aquatic animals) and this reputation should be maintained and preserved through trainings such as this.

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