



PRESS RELEASE

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BTS Technical Committee to hold an Update

Honolulu, Hawaii- The Brown Treesnake Technical Committee will meet at the Hilton Hawaiian Village this week, and the public is invited to attend the Brown Treesnake Program update from 9:00 a.m. to noon on Wednesday, April 6 in the Nautilus room.

The opening talk will be a summary of the review conducted last year to assess research and control programs relating to the brown treesnake. The results were presented to members of Congress last month. ***The review panel found five core areas that require immediate attention:***

1. A legal basis for inspections and enforcement—currently, inspections of cargo and vessels leaving Guam are strictly VOLUNTARY.
2. A greater and more stable funding base. One of several programs that require adequate, stable funding is USDA Wildlife Services. Wildlife Services still lacks the capability to conduct “24-7” inspections of Department of Defense cargo, vehicles and aircraft leaving Guam. At present, BTS search and control activities on Guam Department of Defense installations are operating at approximately 75%.
3. Stronger senior leadership and a sense of ownership to the problem and the solutions. The movement of this pest is tied with the movement of vessels and cargo, which automatically involves agencies such as the Department of Transportation and the Department of Defense. Senior leaders in these and other agencies must be actively involved and demonstrate strong support for BTS programs. This issue must also be elevated within agencies.
4. A comprehensive plan with milestones. The current plan was written in 1996 and does not include measures of progress.
5. Progress on research and program integration. For example, populations of BTS on Guam can be greatly reduced with new and emerging technologies, such as acetaminophen, which is now registered by the Environmental Protection Agency for use in controlling these snakes.

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The Brown Treesnake Control Committee was formed in 1996 and is comprised of representatives from the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, and the Interior; the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI); the Territory of Guam; and the State of Hawaii formed the Brown Treesnake Control Committee, and the Department of Transportation joined the group in 1999.

Brown treesnakes are believed to have been introduced to Guam in the late 1940's or early 1950's, as a stowaway on military cargo. They were first detected around the Naval port in the 1950's. They spread across the entire 549 sq mile island within 20 years. Current population estimates are about 40 snakes per acre. Brown treesnakes are responsible for the extinction or local extirpation of nine of the 12 native forest birds, two of 11 native lizards on Guam, and have contributed to the decline of native fruit bats. The brown treesnake is the single greatest threat to terrestrial ecosystems in the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands and is considered one of the greatest ecological threats to Hawaii.

On Guam, snakebites are the cause of approximately one in every 1,200 emergency room visits, with infants constituting a disproportionately high number of these cases. Brown treesnakes also cause frequent power outages-- nearly 200 localized to island-wide outages occur each year, resulting in millions of dollars of losses from damaged power equipment, electrical repair costs, and lost productivity.

Using the known damage caused by these snakes on Guam, a University of Hawaii economic study estimated that the introduction of the brown treesnake to Hawaii could cost the state's economy between \$28,515,800 and \$405,174,800 annually.

Additional Information

An excellent summary of the BTS invasion history on Guam can be found at:

<http://www.mesc.usgs.gov/resources/education/bts/invasion/history.asp>

Photos can be downloaded from:

http://www.hear.org/announcements/extras/20030609cgapsbtstrainingpressrelease_images.htm

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