

PRESS RELEASE

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Pages: --

Contact: Christy Martin, Public Information Officer, Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species
Ph: (808) 722-0995
Email: christym@rocketmail.com

Screeener Hired to Help Prevent New Plant Invasions

We have seen more than our fair share of invasive plants in Hawaii, plants that harm our forests, agriculture crops, public areas and yards. We also know that it makes sense to know how a plant might perform in Hawaii before bringing it in, propagating it and selling it. Damage done by some alien ornamental plants like the invasive tree miconia (*Miconia calvescens*) and wildfire-promoting fountain grass (*Pennisetum setaceum*) might have been prevented if only we knew then what we know now.

Today, the Hawaii-Pacific Weed Risk Assessment (HWRA) system can predict if a plant may be invasive in Hawaii, with a 95% chance of identifying a potentially invasive plant before it is planted here. The system requires a Plant Screener with access to published, reputable data to answer 49 questions about a plant's biology, geographic origin, and species' behavior elsewhere to determine if the plant might be invasive if planted in Hawaii.

With funding from the Hawaii Invasive Species Council, the HWRA screening process has moved from Dr. Curtis Daehler's office at the University of Hawaii-Manoa to the Lyon Arboretum, and a full-time Plant Screener has been hired. Shahin Ansari, a University of Hawaii-Manoa Botany graduate student, is conducting the screening under the supervision of Lyon Arboretum interim director Dr. Cliff Morden. Ansari worked with Dr. Daehler for 4 years on the HWRA project and during this time gained extensive experience screening over 250 species. She can be reached at Lyon Arboretum at 988-0461 or via email at shahin@hawaii.edu.

More than 600 plants have been screened for their invasive potential through a grant from the Kaulunani Urban Forestry Program of the DLNR Division of Forestry and Wildlife and the USDA Forest Service. Most of the plants screened to date are plants that are already present in Hawaii, and the HWRA information can help guide sound planting decisions. The results are posted at this website: <http://www.botany.hawaii.edu/faculty/daehler/wra/default.htm>. The website provides information on plants that are non-invasive as well as plants that are currently causing damage, and will also be used to post screening results for plants that are not known to be present in Hawaii, ensuring public access to all data and facilitating informed import and planting decisions.

Working to promote voluntary use of the HWRA as a preventative tool is the Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species, LICH president Boyd Ready, and HWRA Liaison Carter Smith. The Oahu Nursery Growers Association (ONGA) was the first Hawaii plant industry group to

agree to use the HWRA for screening new plant introductions, as part of their Codes of Conduct aimed at reducing the risk of invasive plants to Hawaii, and it is hoped that other industry associations will follow suit.

Boyd Ready, President of the Landscape Industry Council of Hawaii has voiced strong support for both the Codes of Conduct project and the HWRA. Ready states, “The Landscape Industry Council’s Executive Committee has agreed that all industry organizations should consider adopting voluntary Codes of Conduct for the introduction and use of exotic plant species in Hawaii, and it is the Council’s goal to have our member organizations signed on by the end of 2006.”

The Codes of Conduct project asks signatories to voluntarily agree to three main points: 1. Have all plants that may be newly introduced to Hawaii screened by the HWRA. 2. Agree to stop selling, growing or specifying a short list of known invasive plants. 3. Identify and promote non-invasive plants.

Ready wants industry unity in this matter. “It is important for all plant industry business to support these efforts, which is based on botanical science, field observations, and consensus. In the absence of unified industry leadership, procedures and invasive plant lists that are inappropriate, unscientific, and conflicting have been circulated and only serve to confuse the public, compete for attention at the legislature, and result in a very difficult marketplace for the professional nurseryman, designer, or contractor. It is time for all landscape industry groups to step up and be counted as a signatory to appropriate and reasonable voluntary Codes of Conduct.”

One benefit of signing the plant industry Codes of Conduct is that signatories that submit new plants for screening will be given priority. To view the Codes of Conduct, visit the LICH website at <http://www.lichawaii.com> and click on “invasive species” at the bottom of the page.

Christy Martin is the Public Information Officer for the statewide Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS).

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