

**Protocol for National Staff for Simultaneous Communication with
Plant Protection and Quarantine's (PPQ) State Plant Health Directors (SPHD)
and State Plant Regulatory Officials (SPRO)
March 2009**

Background: The State Plant Health Director system was announced in 1993 to provide “clear and strong PPQ leadership at the State level....to deliver programs and capitalize on the synergism and economy of enhanced Federal-State relationships” [from December 22, 1993, SPRO letter announcing the launch of the State Plant Health Director position]. Since that time, PPQ has relied heavily on its SPHD's to communicate information from PPQ to State cooperators. However, as field programs have grown and the level of associated coordination in the Regional and Headquarters offices has increased, the traditional top-down communication within PPQ with subsequent communication across to State cooperators has sometimes resulted in critical information ultimately intended for use by both SPHD's and SPRO's not reaching them in a timely fashion. In addition, even when information reaches its intended audience, needed follow-up discussions between State and Federal cooperators are not always conducted since the very fact of having transferred a document can easily be seen as a completed communication. State Plant Health Directors play a vital role in PPQ, ensuring that policies are carried out, regulations are appropriately administered, and operations are conducted efficiently and effectively. They are on the front line of PPQ's work and are the key to our successful partnership with State cooperators in the National Plant Board system. Ensuring that SPHD's and SPRO's receive timely, high-quality information and guidance gives the SPHD's what they need to have those critical conversations with State cooperators that support successful programs.

Protocol: PPQ has reevaluated its communication of information from headquarters to the field and believes the following protocol will enhance the timeliness of information distribution, ensure that information goes to a broad audience, and encourage follow-up dialog about the information between Federal and State partners.

In general, to the extent possible, before finalizing information intended for distribution from headquarters to SPHD's and SPRO's, discuss the draft documents internally with appropriate headquarters staff, regional staff, affected SPHD's or, as appropriate, a representative group of SPHD's and/or SPRO's, to ensure that the draft documents are well understood and everyone is aligned with any resulting policies or protocols. Any necessary internal clearances should also be obtained before finalizing the document. When determining which State officials should be involved in discussions around a draft document, keep in mind that there may be interest and perspective in States other than the directly affected States.

When the document is considered final, it should be distributed to regional staff, SPHD's, and SPRO's simultaneously. Unless the information being conveyed has a strictly local focus, final documents should be sent to all SPHD's and SPRO's so they can determine

for themselves whether the document is important to them. To minimize issues around use of “reply to all,” please place your addresses in the blind carbon copy field of the e-mail, but be clear in your communication about who the document is being sent to and whether there are any expectations of any of the recipients or whether it is simply for information. SPHD’s are responsible for contacting their State counterpart when the final document is received to discuss the nature of the communication and any actions they need to take individually or together as a result.

Advance consultation will not always be necessary in cases where the document being sent out is strictly for informational purposes. In addition, in some instances, an issue will be so urgent that there will not be time for the desired consultations in advance of issuing a document or information. In these instances, information should still be sent out simultaneously and any needed follow-up discussions should occur as soon as possible. There may also be times when some information will need to be communicated to the SPHD’s first and then across to the SPRO’s, although these instances should be infrequent. An example might be the detection of a new pest with potentially serious trade consequences or a situation in which communications are being handled at a higher level in the Department. The critical question to ask yourselves when disseminating information is whether, in sending the information, you will simply be asking the SPHD to forward the document to the SPRO without further elaboration. If the answer to that question is “yes,” send the document to both simultaneously.