

Guidelines for Discussions Between State Plant Health Directors (SPHD) and State Plant Regulatory Officials (SPRO)

Purpose

Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) and the National Plant Board (NPB) encourage periodic focused and structured discussions between the SPHD and SPRO in each State to facilitate dialog, provide the opportunity to deepen understanding of one another's authorities, capacities, roles, and responsibilities, and strengthen the Federal-State relationship. The dialog offers the opportunity to focus on key topics such as emergency planning and engage your staffs in the process to create understanding and consistency among all employees. In addition, any documentation gathered before and during the dialog can serve as orientation material for new employees or successors. A dialog should occur whenever there is a change in either the SPHD or SPRO position. Ideally, a dialog would also occur periodically, perhaps as part of a regular joint planning effort.

The leadership of PPQ and the NPB believe that we must create a common understanding at the local level of some of the most fundamental elements underpinning our relationship and understand the parameters within which each organization must work. Only by building this understanding can we learn to appreciate one another's challenges, leverage one another's strengths, and enhance opportunities for partnership.

Guidelines for Discussion

Determine in advance whether the dialog will be solely between the SPHD and SPRO or whether additional staff will be engaged. Determine a date, time, and location that is agreeable to all parties. You may wish to compile and share some documents in advance of the dialog. Some of the material you may wish to share includes:

- copy of statutory authorities (e.g., state authorities, Plant Protection Act, etc.)
- your organization's mission statement, organizational charts, and strategic plan
- list of human resources that are available to you within your organization, including contact information and designated back-ups
- list of physical resources available to you
- description of data resources you have access to
- list and/or description of agriculture import/export activities in the state
- list of important agriculture industry contacts
- copy of the current cooperative agreement and/or memoranda of understanding

Suggested Ground Rules

Particularly if you are engaging your staff in the dialog, it may be useful to agree to ground rules to support a meaningful discussion. Some examples:

- Participate fully and listen respectfully.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Stay focused on the topic at hand; note tangential issues and return to them later.
- Validate assumptions.
- Define and agree on what important terms mean.
- Discuss "undiscussables."
- Address the issues and problems; not the people.

Having the Conversation

Use the ground rules you have agreed to. If you have exchanged documents in advance, discuss the information contained in them and ask questions. Agree on a protocol for notifying one another if information in any of the documents changes. If you identify issues that need clarification or addressing during this process, make note of them and agree on a follow-up process and timeline. You should also document any ideas generated for strengthening your relationship or taking better advantage of the opportunities provided by the partnership.

Suggested Discussion Agenda

Some topics you may wish to consider for your dialog follow. Feel free to tailor the dialog to your needs and include other relevant topics as you deem appropriate.

Current Plant Health Safeguarding Issues and Programs in the State

- What are the current and emerging plant health issues of concern?
- What are you currently doing alone or together to address these issues (surveys, trace-forward investigations, etc.)?
- Who leads these activities and what coordination is required?
- What kind of support (political will and resources) does each of you have to bring to bear on these issues?
- What pressure is industry exerting on these issues?
- When is it appropriate that the issues be addressed solely by one party?
- Review and discuss current operations plans, survey plans, SITC work plans, etc.:
- What are the important agriculture import and export activities in the state?

Statutory and Regulatory Authorities

- What are the statutory authorities that guide and direct your respective responses to the plant health issues you identified?
- How are your authorities complementary?
- What quarantines/regulations are in place and what may be pending?
- What role does/can SITC play?
- How can you coordinate authorities effectively to ensure compliance by regulated entities and bring effective enforcement actions when necessary?
- How will you handle compliance and enforcement in cooperative programs?
- Review and discuss the [Compliance Strategies Matrix](#) and the [Outreach and Communication Planning Template](#).

Resources

- What *human* resources do you have or have access to?
- What *physical* resources do you have to address plant health issues (labs, transportation, general equipment, computer hardware/software, supplies, etc.).
- What kinds of funds are readily available to you to address plant health issues?
- What kinds of training opportunities are available in each organization?

Data Resources & Requirements

- What data do each of you have access to that would be useful in addressing plant health issues?
- What kinds of data or reports can these resources provide?
- Are there technological impediments to sharing information?
- How can you work together to avoid duplication of effort?
 - What are the Federal and State laws regarding privacy and transparency of the data you collect? Do they conflict? How can you manage this?

Organizational Information

- Review and discuss each other's organizational structures and where you each reside within those structures. How does this affect your working relationship?
- Describe and discuss your respective chains of command and levels of authority, roles and responsibilities. How does this affect the working relationship?

Industry Contacts and Other Important Cooperators

- Who are the important tribal and industry contacts; who are the other stakeholders in your state?
- How do you communicate with them?
- What are their key priorities?
- What outreach activities do you conduct? Can you work together on these?

Cooperative Agreements or Memoranda of Understanding

- Review and discuss your current cooperative agreement(s) and/or memoranda of understanding.
 - Are they current?
 - Do they adequately address the issues they were designed to address?
 - How will agreement documentation be maintained?
 - How will you track, measure, and report progress under each agreement?
 - Are you prepared for a review/audit?

Communication Protocols

- Review your respective lists of personnel and contact information
- Identify who should be contacted if one of you is not immediately available
- Discuss and agree on the issues that require some level of urgency when communicating with one another and agree on methods of communication, e.g., phone, or e-mail.
- Discuss and define any other communication protocols you think will be important to your work together. Will you communicate through weekly calls or meetings? Which staff can work directly on which projects without going through the SPHD or SPRO? How will you work together to resolve any issues that arise around communications?

Other Protocols

Are there other protocols you wish to establish as a result of this conversation? Is there a need to plan and conduct a tabletop emergency exercise?