

Quarantine at Australia's international mail centres

Surprise packages

Checking the mail

Quarantine inspectors screen the mail with the help of x-ray machines and detector dogs.

Any items that seem suspicious need to be opened and checked.

If a letter turns out to contain material that could introduce pests or disease, the quarantine officer might have to send it back. Or the letter could be kept in quarantine until the addressee decides if they want to pay for treatments to remove the risks.

Sometimes risky letters have to be destroyed, if treatment isn't possible.



Quarantine inspectors open and check items of International mail that could bring in pests, weeds or diseases.

Paw prints on your post?

If you get a letter from overseas that looks slightly 'pawed over', you are quite possibly looking at hard evidence of quarantine screening at work.

Your letter may have been picked off the conveyor belt because of a suspicious smell, that upon closer inspection turned out to be okay, or to be coming from another item nearby on the belt.

Quarantine detector dogs work with their handlers to screen mail at each of Australia's international mail handling centres.

A detector dog can sniff out a pressed flower in one envelope among hundreds.

Activity

You are a quarantine inspector working at the Clyde International Mail Centre in Sydney. Your detector dog has just alerted you to a potentially risky parcel on the mail conveyor belt. You open it to discover a dozen packets of plant seeds. Write a polite letter to the sender, telling them about quarantine in Australia, and explaining why you have had to return the seeds to them.

Time bomb?

This parcel seems harmless, but not from a quarantine perspective. Can you identify the items in the parcel, and explain why they could pose a problem for Australia?



A Quarantine detector dog and his handler screen letters posted from overseas, at the Clyde International Mail Centre in Sydney.



Herbal medicines need to be inspected when they come to Australia, because they are organic and therefore could contain pests or diseases.

Believe it or not...

Some of the more unusual items found in mail sent to Australia include:

- live meat-eating plants;
- foul-smelling meat;
- dried springbok steak;
- vacuum-packed turkeys;
- pickled eggs; and
- a preserved human finger.



Quarantine inspectors find all kinds of things in mail sent to Australia. Anything made from plants or animals must be checked and could contain pests or diseases we do not have in Australia.

Let's celebrate!

Australia is lucky to be a multicultural society. We're lucky because we are able to experience many other cultures in our own country.

Each culture has its own unique language, food, festivals, clothes and many interesting traditions.

Quarantine officers at mail centres need to know about the different cultures because at certain times of the year special, traditional food and other items will be sent by friends and relatives overseas to their loved ones in Australia.

For example moon cakes are sent from China in September to celebrate the Chinese Moon Festival. Moon cakes are pastries filled with meat, egg, or seeds and nuts. Secret messages used to be hidden inside the moon cakes.

Other festivals include Diwali, celebrated by Indians; Hanukkah, a Jewish celebration; Buddha's birthday; and Vietnamese Tet.

Discussion

Can you think of a festival that is celebrated by your own family each year? Are there any special foods eaten during the festival and any traditions that are celebrated (eg giving presents, lighting candles)?

As a class, how many festivals can you come up with? Write them all on the board, and list any foods and traditional practices next to each.



Let's celebrate! How many different festivals are celebrated by people in your class?

Activity

Plan a multicultural day for your class. You may want to arrange some or all of the following: food, outfits, hats, customs, traditions, dances, stories or songs.

Who am I?

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... I am – if you haven't already guessed – a letter posted from overseas, which didn't meet Australia's quarantine rules.

Quarantine screens 140 million items of overseas mail coming into Australia each year, including about 117 million letters.

Our quarantine laws are tougher than many countries. So some people don't realise it's not OK to send food, plant products and animal products to Australia. If you have friends or family overseas, remind them to check before sending you stuff in the mail: www.aqis.gov.au/mail