



COMMISSION ON PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES

NINETEENTH SESSION

UPDATE FROM THE CPM FOCUS GROUP ON SEA CONTAINERS

AGENDA ITEM 13.2

(Prepared by the Focus Group and the IPPC Secretariat)

Introduction

- [1] The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the CPM Focus Group on Sea Containers (the Focus Group) were agreed to by CPM-16 in 2022 outlining the key purpose of the group to review all relevant materials and recommendations, develop viable options that will contribute to risk management, and provide CPM with recommendations, including considerations around the option of development of an ISPM.
- [2] CPM-18 (2024) noted the work undertaken by the Focus Group and associated recommendation, subsequently approving the revised [Recommendation 6](#), extension of the mandate until 2027 and the [ToR](#) as amended following the Friends of the Chair meeting.
- [3] The purpose of the extended mandate of the Focus Group is to continue the work carried out by the 2022-2023 Focus Group, as outlined in the in its [2023 report](#) presented to CPM-18, and review all new, emerging and evolving technologies and opportunities. In considering these factors, the Focus Group will provide final recommendations to the CPM on long-term IPPC guidance, in 2027.

Update from the CPM Focus Group on Sea Containers

- [4] In order to address the items outlined in the ToR, as approved by CPM-18, the Focus Group met virtually in October 2024 and developed an Action Plan which was presented to, and approved by, the CPM Bureau in October 2024.
- [5] Further activities and updates from the Focus Group are outlined below.

International Symposium on Optimising Container Design to Mitigate Risks of Pest Contamination

- [6] The International Symposium on Optimising Container Design to Mitigate Risks of Pest Contamination was held on 11 November 2024 in Rotterdam. The event was supported by the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) Secretariat, in collaboration with the Container Owners Association (COA), the World Shipping Council (WSC), and the Bureau International des Containers (BIC).
- [7] The symposium focused on practical container design modifications to minimize pest contamination, including flooring design options to minimize cracks and crevices which pose risks for harbouring contamination. Under structure designs with fewer horizontal ledge designs and the reduction of bitumastic under-coatings were also considered, amongst a number of other identified options. The

modifications considered are intended to minimize pest risks whilst maintaining functionality and cost-effectiveness.

- [8] This forum provided an excellent opportunity to raise further awareness of this important issue, the work of the Focus Group and the risks associated with the pathway, to a wide audience and gain insights from a stakeholder perspective in relation to the practicalities of design modifications being considered.
- [9] Attendees included representatives from major carriers, leasing companies, container manufacturers, biosecurity experts, and plant health stakeholders, including representatives of the NPPO of the Netherlands.
- [10] A number of presentations were delivered providing shippers' perspectives on this topic, key findings of the IPBES Assessment Report on Invasive Alien Species and their Control, an overview of the plant health risks associated with the sea container pathway and the relation to sea container structures, as well as potential design modification options. All presentations are available on the [IPP Symposium webpage](#).
- [11] As a conclusion, representatives from the major container owners, operators and manufacturers were identified for the establishment of a working group to progress the ideas introduced. The intent of the group is to present proposals for container design modifications to Focus Group to contribute towards the Focus Group's final recommendations to CPM.

CTU Code revision

- [12] As part of the Focus Group's ToR, the Focus Group has continued to work with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), as one of the three UN co-sponsors of the Cargo Transport Unit Code ([CTU Code](#)) undertaking a revision of the Code, to update and enhance included information on the prevention of pest contamination.
- [13] The Focus Group previously drafted and proposed amendments to the CTU Code for the prevention of pest contamination, as outlined in section 3.4 of the 2023 Report of CPM Focus Group on Sea Containers ([CPM 2024/25_01](#)).
- [14] Following the initially proposed amendments, the Informal meeting on Code of Practice for Packing of Cargo Transport Units, at the request of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Working Party on Intermodal Transport and Logistics (WP.24), reconvened several times to collectively progress the revision of the CTU Code. Focus Group and IPPC Secretariat representatives actively participated to ensure that proposed pest prevention amendments remained in line with the revised [CPM Recommendation 6](#) on sea containers, as adopted by CPM-18, whilst fitting with the proposed format of the revised CTU Code and taking into consideration comments from other members of the informal meetings.
- [15] These amendments were subsequently presented to and considered at the WP.24 meeting, held on 16-17 December 2024 in Geneva.

Regulatory and non-regulatory options

- [16] To continue progression of the ToR to analyse potential regulatory and non-regulatory options in order to identify and describe a recommended option or options to minimize pest risks in the sea container pathway, the Focus Group has worked to develop an assessment template for global solutions.
- [17] This template, developed through the Focus Group subgroup on regulatory and non-regulatory options, assists Focus Group members in assessing potential solutions based on several criteria. These criteria are based on work undertaken by the subgroup to evaluate and analyze proposals and measures and

prepare recommendations for the Focus Group to further elaborate practical, feasible, economical, concrete measures that could be globally adopted.

- [18] The criteria cover multiple considerations for the assessments, including impact on industry, economics, contracting parties and other agencies, implications on time/cost/quality of trade, legislative authorities, specific risks to be managed, assurance measures, regulatory resources and the state of readiness (is the measure proven or conceptual).
- [19] Once assessments are completed for each identified measure, these can be used to determine what is needed to be minimum viable product.

WCO SAFE Framework

- [20] Following the work of the 2022-2023 mandate of the Focus Group in relation to the inclusion of phytosanitary aspects into Pillar 3 of the WCO SAFE Framework, as outlined in section 3.2 of the 2023 Report of CPM Focus Group on Sea Containers (CPM 2024/25_01), and through participation in WCO Sub-Group on the SAFE Framework and WCO SAFE Working Group (SWG) sessions, the Focus Group developed updated proposals, relating to Pillar 3, which were presented at the WCO Sub-Group on the SAFE Framework meeting in November 2024.
- [21] These proposals, whilst receiving an initial positive response, were ultimately not supported unanimously at the November 2024 meeting. The main concern raised was related to the primary purpose of the SAFE Framework. Some participants noted that supply chain security is considered the primary purpose of the SAFE Framework, therefore there was a view by some that pest contamination measures do not fall within the scope and those members could not support the inclusion of phytosanitary aspects as proposed.
- [22] The WCO suggested however, that following further consideration and revision, taking into account comments received, the proposals may be resubmitted during the upcoming new review cycle of the SAFE Framework, which begins on 1 July 2025. This will give time for further potential engagement WCO representatives and with members to discuss concerns raised.
- [23] Additionally, following the discussion relating to what exactly the SAFE Framework entails, it was suggested by one NPPO to engage in collective discussions to consider and revisit what the first principles of the SAFE Framework encompass.
- [24] The outcomes of the April 2025 discussions related to the first principles will assist to determine if the SAFE Framework is a suitable place for the proposed phytosanitary aspects, as well as direct further consideration of other WCO tools as a mechanism to capture the proposed information.

Progress report and preliminary conclusions of China's Global Biosafety Risk Factors Monitoring and Research Project for Sea Containers

- [25] At the December 2024 physical meeting of the Focus Group, an update was provided on China's Global Biosafety Risk Factors Monitoring and Research Project for Sea Containers.
- [26] To enhance collaboration between NPPOS and industry in the collection of pest risk information relating to sea containers, China Customs has undertaken a comprehensive study on the monitoring of associated global risk factors, initiated in March 2024.
- [27] The project is divided into three key parts:
1. Customs officers conducting regular inspections of empty containers to gather information about potential contaminants.

2. Customs officers selecting a specific number of empty import containers for a thorough inspection, with bio-safety risk factor information collected from twelve different sites of each container.
3. Complete inspection of twelve sites of various design test containers to gather information on contamination and structural damage. In addition to customs, other participating units include the container production and shipping company.

[28] Between March and October 2024, customs districts in Shenzhen, Shanghai, and Ningbo conducted random inspections of 14,799 empty containers. This effort resulted in 1,185 detections of contamination, involving 1,208 empty containers originating from 67 countries or regions across 6 continents, with the overall interception rate calculated at 8.16%.

[29] Contaminants identified encompassed soil, seeds, plant materials, insect eggs, insects, and residues from goods not documented in the shipping manifest. Additionally, during the March to October 2024 period, 8 species of quarantine pests were intercepted 16 times, and 9 species of invasive alien organisms were encountered 66 times.

[30] In August 2024, the Dapeng Customs House intercepted the alien species *Camponotus pennsylvanicus* from 41 imported empty containers. These containers were traced back to four separate countries. A considerable number of live ants were discovered within each container, with population estimates ranging from hundreds to thousands.

[31] These findings underscore the significant risk posed by pest contamination disseminated via empty containers in international transport and highlight the need for enhanced monitoring and preventative measures to minimize pest risks associated with the international movements of sea containers.

Communications and awareness raising

[32] Noting the identified importance and need for continued awareness raising, as highlighted in the revised CPM Recommendation 6, the Focus Group has identified a number of communication and education activities which are being progressed to communicate information about the risk of pest movement via the sea-container pathway and promote and assist guide practices to reduce this risk, to all parties involved with the movement of sea containers.

[33] Activities identified include development of a dedicated ‘Stakeholder Engagement Plan’, compilation of an inventory of existing guidance materials on managing pest risks to assist as a reference document to be distributed to key parties, syndicated interviews on behalf of the IPPC and the Focus Group, and the development and delivery of a webinar on the work of the Focus Group and the revised CPM Recommendation 6 for NPPOs potentially for late 2026.

Custodial responsibilities

[34] As a result of the previous work of the Focus Group, the “Custodial Responsibility” approach has been developed. This approach refers to the responsibility of the receiving container custodian to determine whether the previous custodian has met their responsibility and to hold them accountable in case visible pest contamination has been found in the sea container and/or its cargo.

[35] Work is continuing in relation to the development of this approach, in particular by members of the Focus Group representing the World Shipping Council (WSC), Global Shippers Forum (GSF) and Bureau International des Containers (BIC).

[36] A high-level concept workflow diagram has been developed outlining the sequences of events and intervals of sea containers throughout the pathway, noting the responsible parties at touch points,

which was presented at the 2023 International Sea Containers Workshop in Brisbane, Australia. Significant work is underway to further articulate individual party's responsibilities and turn this information into actionable workflow processes. This also includes wider engagement with global and regional representative bodies and development of information specifically targeted at the different parties in relation to checking for contamination and actions to take when this is identified, taking into consideration the differing operating procedures and environments.

- [37] A revision is also being considered to the Joint Industry Container Cleanliness Guidelines to further expand the parties to which this is targeted and provide a comprehensive set of joint industry guidelines which will assist in supporting the uptake of the Custodial Responsibility approach by providing guidance to all parties involved in the supply chain.

Proposal for CPM-20 side session

- [38] The Focus Group is preparing a concept note for a proposed side session to be held at CPM-19. This will look to provide further detailed updates on the progress of the activities outlined in the ToR and updates on the developments related to sea container design modifications, the custodial responsibility approach as well as further information from the IPBES Assessment Report on Invasive Alien Species and their Control.

Consideration of 2026 Workshop

- [39] In order to assist in determining the impacts of the revised CPM Recommendation 6 and following the success of the 2023 International Sea Containers Workshop, the Focus Group, as part of their ToR, is initiating preparations to ensure further practical and feasible outcomes. The 2026 workshop will play an important role in determining the next steps and the final recommendation to CPM-21 in 2027.

Collaboration

- [40] Additionally, the Focus Group will continue its work to further investigate and pursue identified and new collaboration opportunities with IMO, CBD, WCO, WOA, IPBES and UNECE to continue to review uptake of revised CPM Recommendation 6, and continue other options, for example to review anticipated developments relating to improved technology, container design, and industry-led proposals including the custodial responsibility model.

Future chairing arrangements

- [41] At the December 2024 physical meeting, the Focus Group considered chairing arrangements following CPM-19, after which the current chair, Mr. Gregory WOLFF, will be stepping aside from the role.
- [42] A proposal for the structure of the Focus Group was put forward to include two Co-Chairs. It was considered that applying this format, with the Co-Chairs located in differing time zones and taking into consideration the wide demographic of members, will further support the facilitation of meetings and discussions to ensure the effective participation of all members. Additionally, considering representatives from both the Northern and Southern hemispheres will bring a strengthened presentation and knowledge of balanced hemispheric and regional perspectives, which may become more important as some Regional Plant Protection Organizations embark on more active sea containers-related work.
- [43] In addition to the Co-Chair positions, the Focus Group agreed to adopt the role of Vice Chair to importantly support the Co-Chairs in the facilitation of meetings and discussions where required.
- [44] The Focus Group selected Mr. Thorwald GEUZE (Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority and IC representative) and Mr. Rama KARRI (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and

Forestry, Australia) to fulfil the roles of Co-Chairs following CPM-19. The Focus Group also selected Ms. Guanghao GU (Animal and Plant Quarantine Division, China) to fulfil the role of Vice Chair.

Recommendations

[45] The CPM is invited to:

- (1) *Note* the 2024 update of the CPM Focus Group on Sea Containers.