

Recommended Voluntary Guidelines Aquarium Industry

RIDNIS Phase II

**Reducing the Introduction and Distribution
of Non-Native Invasive Species**

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Recommended Voluntary Guidelines for the Aquarium Industry

Incentive-Based Guidelines

- Investigate the possibility of financial incentives for businesses that implement customer outreach programs
- Institute a public relations program to acknowledge businesses promoting spread prevention
- Have a “seal of approval” for businesses that are certified “green”
- Develop a system of tax credits for stores that accept returns of plants and animals
- Give “Good Citizen” stickers or prizes for those active in spread prevention programs

Return, Collection and Disposal Guidelines

- Institute and then advertise active trade-in or recycle programs for stores willing to participate
- Establish aquatic plant and animal “collection stations” in stores or other convenient locations (similar to oil recycling centers)
- Investigate customer willingness to pay a small fee for returning species (i.e. a “restock” fee for large fish)
- Stores that don’t accept returns should have a list of the nearby locations that do
- Keep an updated list of available “recycle centers” on store websites
- Encourage public aquariums to accept returns of unwanted fish
- Keep track of data on returns (how many, and what kind, in a given time period)

Guidelines for Store Employees

- Educating retail staff at aquarium stores and employees of wholesale/distributing companies should be a high priority
- Distribute ready-made training materials for employees
- Make web-based training available for staff and award a “certificate” for completion of the program

Outreach Guidelines for Industry Businesses and Public Institutions

- Keep the message positive
- Capitalize on similarities between stores such as the use of common fish bags to get message out
- Focus efforts where the largest number of people will be reached
- Provide fact sheets on fish that will become really large and provide suggestions for alternatives

- Add information about potential invasiveness and the “don’t release” message on each care sheet
- Provide invasive species education at collection and disposal sites
- Encourage public aquariums to provide more invasive species outreach to local schools (example of new program at the New England Aquarium where they take returns and work with schools)
- Develop ready-made outreach materials on invasive species that can be shared amongst retailers
- Explain to customers that releases into the wild can lead to inhumane death of aquatic animals
- Alternative non-invasive species should be available in stores and recommended to customers
- Tie invasive species impacts to economic costs to encourage people to change their behavior
- Identify hobbyist-speakers and work with them to develop educational presentations for schools, aquarium hobbyist/society meetings, etc.
- Create and distribute an invasive species video for aquarium society libraries
- Show video/give talks at monthly meetings for hobbyist groups and aquarium societies
- Recruit younger members to aquarium societies to spread the word about aquatic invasive species
- Identify and publicize those aquatic plant and animal species that are known to be invasive or have demonstrated invasive potential
- Work with Exhibit Development Teams at public aquariums to enhance aquatic invasive species outreach through permanent installations (an example is the hands-on “Invasion of the Habitat Snatchers” exhibit at the Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport, Oregon)
- Work with the Monterey Bay Aquarium on long-term strategies to include more invasive species outreach to their visitors (1.8 million per year)
- Work with National Marine Sanctuary Visitor Centers to distribute information about aquatic invasive species and how to prevent new introductions from aquarium releases
- Work with National Estuarine Research Reserve Visitor Centers to distribute information about aquatic invasive species and how to prevent new introductions from aquarium releases
- Identify and use links to state URLs that list prohibited aquatic species
- Educate young children
- Create interesting displays (for example, something that rotates on the ceiling) rather than the usual text-heavy pamphlets
- Eye-catching visual media in the store is the best way to get the attention of customers
- Use T-shirts, caps, etc. to advertise “don’t release” message in stores and outside
- Create video/DVD on invasive species that can be viewed in the store (infomercial)
- Create a fun, interactive video game on invasive species for kids

- Encourage schools to use aquaria on site for education about aquatic invasive species
- Use Trade Shows, Consumer Shows and Wholesale/Distributor Open Houses as educational opportunities (schedule talks and exhibits for the morning of the first day, and use incentives like food/prizes to boost attendance)
- Publish more articles about aquatic invasive species in Trade magazines as well as kid's magazines like Ranger Rick
- PIJAC is looking into getting authorization to sell Habitattitude™ items at National Parks
- Evaluation of outreach programs is important – determine how to measure whether customer behavior has changed as a result of the education
- Survey businesses about their interactions with customers, and vice versa

Regulatory Guidelines and Issues

- Initiate an amnesty program for people returning illegal species (follow progress of Florida pilot program)
- The decision should not be left up to the customer – stores shouldn't sell dangerous or illegal items
- States need to do a better job at publicizing which species are illegal; they should keep info on this issue up-to-date on their websites
- State prohibited and regulated species lists are not uniform so education/outreach programs at the retail level need to be customized
- A "Clean List" would be difficult to maintain because it would be so large
- Many shippers, and customs and border agents aren't familiar with regulated and other problem species – they need more training
- The Internet makes illegal and problem species very easy to get in spite of the positive education that occurs in stores
- Misidentification of illegal, regulated and problem species is rampant
- Legal issues surrounding 'humane treatment' of animals are complicated and difficult

Guidelines Regarding Obstacles to Cooperation

- Businesses do not have enough staff or money to create outreach materials on their own
- There is a lack of reliable/accurate/up-to-date information about invasive species available
- In order to get people to believe there is really a problem, more case studies are needed showing the impacts of invasive aquatic species
- There are few good examples of aquarium releases that have caused major problems, with the exception of *Caulerpa taxifolia*
- A list of alternatives is needed to recommend to customers (developing this list should be a cooperative effort with industry, government and consumer)
- Scheduled education/training for aquarium business staff is rare at this point in time

- Lack of floor/counter space for exhibits, handouts, etc. is a limitation in some stores
- The high moisture and dust environment in some small pet/aquarium stores may present a problem with the use of TV/monitors for educational videos
- Lack of store space for returns/disposal of plants and animals is a limitation
- Disease is a concern for fish returns
- Employee turnover is high so training needs to be on a continual basis
- Customer needs and attitudes are different so it is essential to customize educational programs
- There are regional differences in awareness and attitudes about aquatic invasive species
- Wholesalers/distributors don't always know what they are selling to the retailers
- Employees are not encouraged to spend time with customers (should be stocking shelves instead)
- PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) has "humane treatment" issues with euthanasia and animal disposal
- Relationship is tenuous between industry and the humane society
- Humane Society can practice euthanasia under state law but this would be a problem for aquarium businesses and they would take a lot of heat from PETA and the public
- It is difficult to get customers to accept even humane euthanasia when they get so emotionally attached to their fish and pets
- There may be a need for two tracks for "returns": one for legal species and another for illegal species
- Proper disclosure on pet disposal may cause problems
- Diversity of customer base makes it difficult to have a "one size fits all" solution
- Difficult to measure positive environmental change resulting from any change in attitude/behavior
- Some people won't follow "don't release" or other recommendations even if they are told it's the "right thing to do"
- It is human nature to wait until there is a crisis and then react, rather than practice prevention