



QUARANTINE WASTE

Quarantine waste in Australia refers to all waste from another country, or region that is classified by the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Services. The aim of quarantine is to protect Australia and its citizens from the entry of threatening or unwanted exotic pests, plants or animals, or diseases. This is quite a task considering approximately eight million passengers and 20 million tonnes of cargo passes through quarantine every year (AQIS)! Australia's relative isolation from other countries has meant that its unique environment is more at risk from invasive pests and diseases as international travel and trade continue to grow.

Pests and diseases can be carried into Australia by people; animals and animal products (for example meat); plants and plant products (such as timber) and soil (on machinery). All of these items must undergo quarantine inspections, with plants and animals requiring periods of isolation in quarantine stations to prevent the spread of contamination. Examples of infectious diseases are Mad Cow Disease, SARS and Typhoid. Pests that have been brought into Australia and have become rampant include cane toads, lantana, camphor laurels, pigeons and even

the mice that came over with the first fleet.

Many items are seized by quarantine every year and are unable to be used in Australia these goods end up as waste. The two main methods of treatment of quarantine goods are by incineration or steam sterilisation. Incineration involves burning the quarantine waste at high temperatures and ensures guaranteed destruction rather than sterilisation. However, the process also emits toxic pollution including dioxins, a very poisonous chemical.

Steam sterilisation is deemed a cleaner and a more cost effective solution to incineration. Steam sterilisation of quarantine waste occurs at a minimum of 121oC for 30 minutes (a requirement of the Environment Protection Authority). All odours and vapours are locked in the sterilisation chamber which then exhausts through a condensing system that ensures no emissions escape into the atmosphere. The treated waste is then certified sterile and is recycled where possible, or compacted and disposed of in landfill.

Reference:
AQIS, online at www.daff.gov.au/aqis

WHAT CAN I DO?

- When travelling, ensure you are aware of what you can and cannot bring into Australia or between states, such as Tasmania. www.daff.gov.au/aqis has links to Quarantine and Export Services in Australia and includes what items require periods of quarantine and what items are not allowed.

MORE INFORMATION

- www.greenpeace.org.nz - quarantine waste issues in New Zealand; the case for steam sterilisation
- <http://entech.net.au/ws2/case5.htm> - the case for quarantine waste incineration
- www.daff.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/114267/waste.pdf - Australian Quarantines fact sheet on waste.