Biosecurity engagement:
Communicating biosecurity messages in print

Every year, government, industry and other agencies produce significant amounts of print material in order to communicate biosecurity messages to target groups such as growers, community groups, 'backyarders', culturally and linguistically diverse groups and the general Australian public.

The effectiveness of this strategy is not always clear and literature suggests that print material alone seldom changes behaviour. Interaction with trusted individuals is more likely to influence people's decision making. There will, however, always be a need for print material to reinforce messages and provide future reference for target groups.

It can be easy, when producing print materials, to expend enormous effort and cost getting the words right grammatically and factually without considering how best to distribute and promote the materials.

This information sheet has been designed to help you get the best value from producing print materials, such as brochures, reports, manuals, guides and media releases.

Producing the document

- **Tailor your message for different target groups.** Emphasise the effect the particular pest, weed or disease could have on what is important to the target group. For growers, it might be increased spraying or loss of export markets; for town residents, it could be decreased backyard crops. Regional income and/or employment opportunities could be reduced; native species habitat might be compromised.

- **Choose your words carefully.** Use language with which your target group can connect. Avoid academic, scientific or bureaucratic language. Don't use jargon and avoid acronyms. If your message is going to many people whose first language may not be English, consider having the document translated into other languages.

- **Keep the text short.** What do you want to tell your readers? Make your message clear and concise. If there is supplementary technical information (such as details of a pest's life cycle), give pointers to websites and other places where this information is easily available.

- **Use high quality images.** If your publication tells people how to identify pests, weeds, diseases or host plants, highlight distinctive features of the organism through use of close-up images so these features are easily recognisable.

- **Layout is important.** Make sure the formatting is easy to read and draws the reader's attention to the most important parts of the document or page.

- **Produce practical products.** Find out what format would best suit your target group. Consider the local climate; climates with lots of dust or moisture will require sturdy documents that can withstand these elements. Consider using:

  – posters that can be displayed in farm sheds or staff rooms

  – sturdy 'pocket' guides that can be stored in the glovebox of farm vehicles.

Making it easy for readers to do what's needed

Make sure your document clearly explains how the target group can contribute to addressing the issue; for example, maintaining on-farm hygiene, picking up backyard fruit, reporting suspected pests, disposing of or eating fresh produce before entering a pest exclusion zone or removing host plants from gardens.

Even if messages have been communicated before, it is beneficial to remind people about them. It is easy to overestimate people's awareness of the potential effects of pests, weeds or diseases or of the preferred actions.

Consider how you could help people do the preferred action. Would a checklist be handy for farmers to maintain farm hygiene? Is a template useful for paperwork such as vendor declarations? Are hotline numbers current, accurate and conspicuous enough to be easily seen?

Providing opportunities for getting more information

Include contact details of organisations or people the target group can contact if they have questions. Details of useful websites are also a good way to encourage people to learn more.

Road testing your draft document

Before you print anything, try the document out on people in the target group. Ask them to proof read the document. Is the message clear? Ask for suggestions that would add value to the document.

Getting the message to the right people

Be aware that documents often need to 'find' their target group, rather than assuming the target group will find your documents.

One of the most effective ways to get people's attention is for someone to hand them a document, explaining face-to-face what it is about and why the issue is important, and giving them a chance to ask questions.

Consider sending it out through a trusted intermediary, such as someone with whom the target group feels a connection and trusts. Such contacts might include on-farm consultants, industry leaders, other influential farmers or industry development officers, community leaders or teachers.

To ensure the document is widely available, put community-targeted information in public libraries, nurseries, schools, shopping centres and at community events. Put publications for farmers in local farm supply stores; have them available at field days. Make documents available online and try to place links on websites you know are popular with your target group. However, do not rely solely on these passive methods of information dissemination.

When documents are part of a display (such as an information stand at a field day) make the display as eye-catching as possible. Display examples of pests or weeds in resin blocks, or give people the chance to look at an organism under a microscope. Encourage people who staff information stands to talk to visitors about the key messages in your document.

Distribute your information to any available media—online, radio, newsletters and newspapers. Consider writing 'good news' stories about people using the document or who find the key messages important or valuable.

Useful links

Bowyer, J & Shanks, M 2007, *Natural resource management intermediaries as potential next-users*, Planning for Impact Series, Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food, available at www.agric.wa.gov.au/content/lwe/nrmnextusers.pdf.

The Plain Language Action and Information Network strives to improve communication between government and the public. Go to www.plainlanguage.gov/index.cfm.

The Plain English Campaign website gives some good free resources. Go to www.plainenglish.co.uk/free-guides.html.