An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

Passenger Baggage Plant Health Checks upon Entry to Dublin Airport

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EPPO Workshop

Content

Overview

Dublin Airport is Ireland's main gateway for international travel and a key biosecurity checkpoint.
Agriculture Inspectors protect the country's farms and ecosystems by checking passenger baggage for plants, seeds, and soil that could carry harmful pests or diseases.

Mission Statement

To protect Ireland's agriculture, environment, and biodiversity by preventing the introduction of harmful plant pests and diseases through passenger baggage at Dublin Airport.

Key Objectives

Prevent Biosecurity Risks

- Detect and intercept prohibited or high-risk plant material entering Ireland through passenger baggage.

Ensure Regulatory Compliance

- Enforce EU and national plant health legislation effectively at Ireland's busiest international gateway.

Promote Traveller Awareness

- Educate passengers on import restrictions and the importance of safeguarding plant health.

Regulatory Framework

Rules that Keep Ireland Safe

- **Governing Regulations**
  EU Plant Health Regulation (EU 2016/2031) and Official Controls Regulation (EU 2017/625).

- **Declaration Requirement**
  Passengers must declare all plant, seed, soil, and organic materials when entering Ireland from outside the EU.

- **Phytosanitary Certification**
  Most plants and plant products require a valid certificate issued by the exporting country.

- **Enforcement**
  Non-compliant goods are seized or destroyed to protect national biosecurity..

All passenger baggage checks are carried out under strict EU and national plant health legislation.

A Connected World

Risks and Challenges

Global Connectivity

International travel and trade have increased the global movement of plants, food, and organic materials, raising the risk of pest introduction.

Hidden Threats

Even tiny amounts of infested plant material can carry serious pests or diseases that, once established, are difficult or impossible to eradicate.

Biosecurity Frontline

Airports are a vital defence point, helping to safeguard national agriculture, forestry, and biodiversity from invasive organisms.

Dublin Airport

Overview & Activity Snapshot (2024)

Dublin Airport plays a central role in safeguarding Ireland's biosecurity while facilitating one of Europe's busiest passenger networks. The airport's scale, global reach, and constant passenger flow make it a critical checkpoint for plant health protection and regulatory enforcement.

Passenger Volume

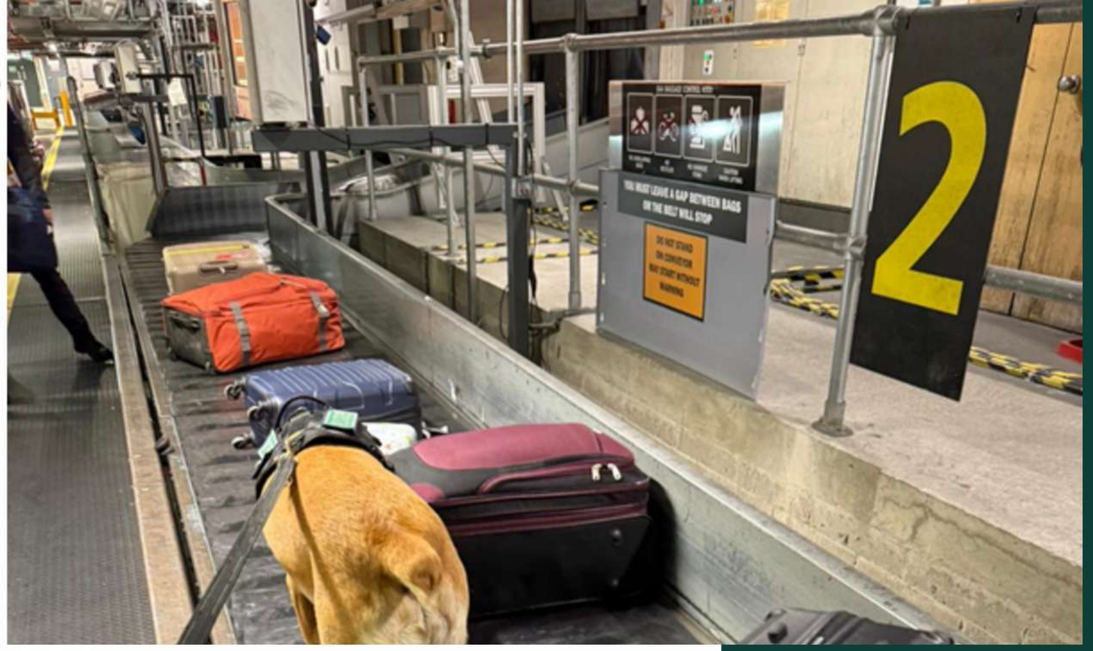
In 2024, over 33.3 million passengers passed through Dublin Airport: with between 90,000 and 100,000 travellers daily.

Operational Scale

Around 229,000 flights were managed during the year, connecting Ireland to major destinations worldwide.

Network Reach

More than 45 airlines now serve 197 destinations, with approximately 20% of inbound flights originating outside the EU, including routes from the U.S., Middle East, Asia, and Africa.



Why Inspect Passenger Baggage?

Passenger baggage checks are a vital part of Ireland's biosecurity system, helping to stop harmful pests and plant diseases before they enter the country.

Unintentional Risks

- Many passengers carry plants, fruits, seeds, or soil without realising these are restricted or prohibited under plant health laws.

Potential Impact

- Even small amounts of contaminated material can harbour pests or diseases capable of damaging crops, forestry, and ecosystems.

Last Line of Defence

- Agriculture Inspectors are Ireland's final barrier against invasive threats hidden in passenger baggage.

National Protection

- Every inspection helps protect Irish agriculture, trade reputation, and the country's rich natural environment.

Identifying High-Risk Baggage

Targeting What matters Most

Not all baggage poses the same level of risk. Inspections focus on detecting items that could introduce harmful pests or plant diseases into Ireland.

Personal Effects

Everyday travel goods such as hand luggage and checked bags are routinely screened.

Biosecurity Risk Items

Plants, seeds, bulbs, fruits, soil, and untreated wood can harbour pests or diseases and require special attention.

Targeted Screening

High-risk flights and random spot checks on passengers from key EU transit hubs help identify undeclared plant materials.

Risk Assessment

Differentiating Risk Levels

Risk-based passenger selection using flight manifests, customs data, and country-of-origin analysis.

01

High Risk

Direct arrivals from tropical or subtropical regions with elevated pest risk.

02

Moderate Risk

Connecting flights via major hubs (e.g. Istanbul, Dubai).

03

Low Risk

Intra-EU travel with minimal plant health concerns.

Every passenger is a potential biosecurity risk: assessment is essential.

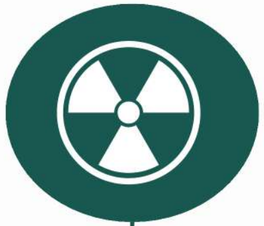
Baggage Screening Process

1.Detection

Sniffer dogs patrol baggage areas to identify potential plant materials.

2. Selection

Inspectors mark suspect bags for detailed inspection.



3. X-Ray Review

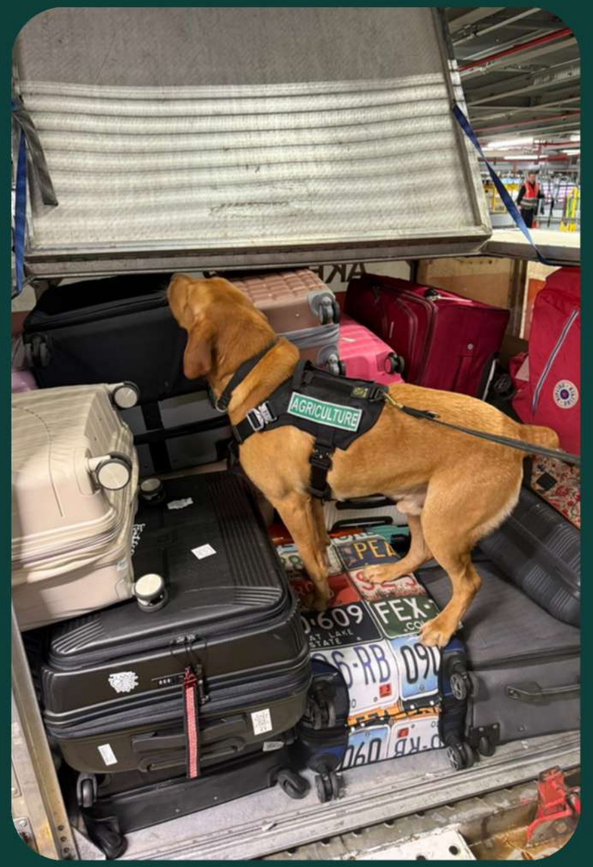
Customs scanners detect organic materials requiring further checks.

4. Inspection

Baggage is opened and inspected under controlled conditions; documents are verified.

5. Decision

Compliant items are cleared; non-compliant goods are seized or destroyed.



Technology and trained animals work side by side to keep Ireland's borders secure.

Detection Tools: Sniffer Dogs & X-Ray

- **Specialist Training**: Dogs are trained to detect the scent of plant and organic material with remarkable accuracy.
- **Complementary Systems**: The use of both canine detection and X-ray technology ensures a thorough and efficient screening process.
- **Operational Benefits:** Enhances detection rates and reduces reliance on random manual inspections.
- **Positive Passenger Experience:** Sniffer dogs operate calmly and efficiently, often drawing interest and support from the public.

Commonly Detected Items

Plants
Live potted plants and cuttings

Seeds
Seeds (food crops, ornamental, or unknown)

Fruit & Veg
Fruit, vegetables, herbs, dried leaves

Soil
Soil or sand samples

Plant Decor
Plant decorations or souvenirs

Example of Non-Compliance

Most violations unintentional but high risk

Africa

Passengers from Africa carrying yam tubers

Asia

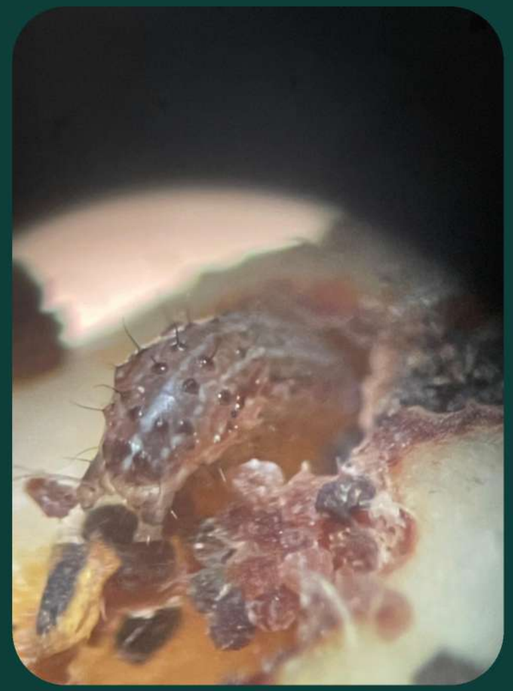
Travellers from Asia bringing bonsai plant in soil

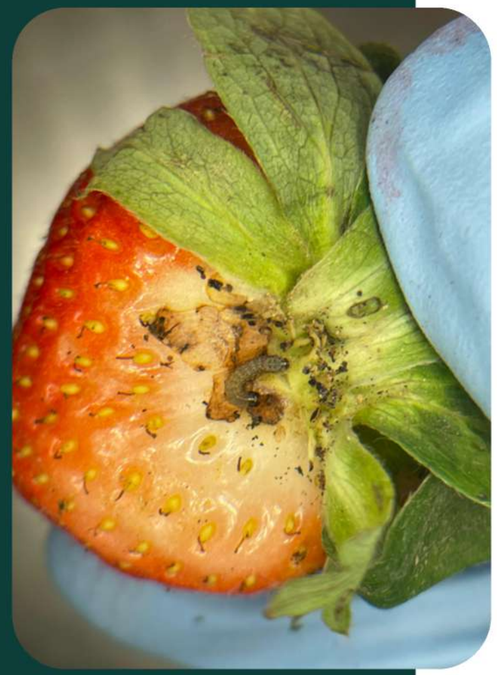
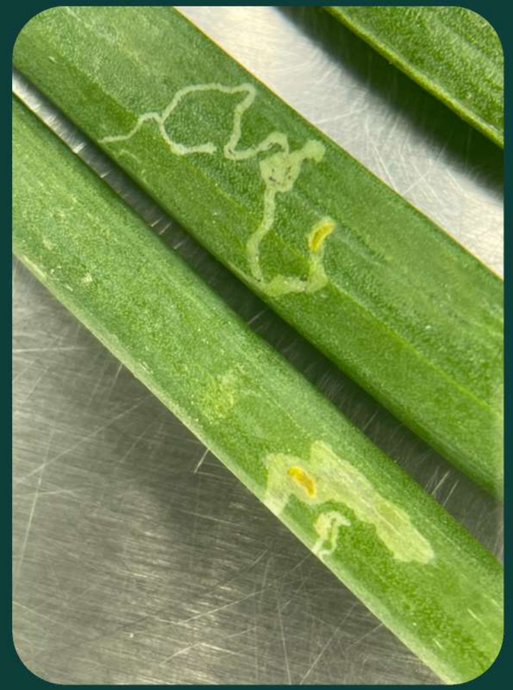
South America

Tourist from South America with seed packets

Non-EU

Non-EU student importing roots for remedies



Examples of Pest Detected

What Happens When Non-Compliant Items Are Found

Destruction

Item is safely detained or destroyed to prevent pest entry.

Step 1

Awareness

Traveller is informed of regulations and the reason for action taken.

Step 2

Fines

Serious breaches may result in fines or prosecution.

Step 3

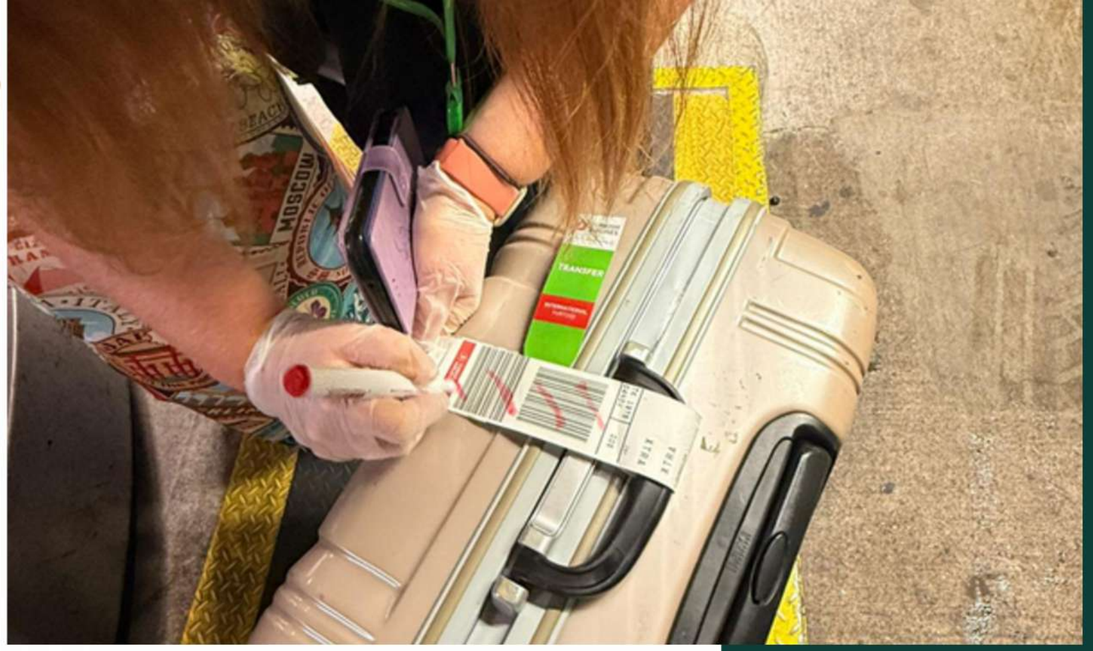
Data Reporting

All data shared with DAFM and the EU Plant Health Network for monitoring and analysis.

Step 4

Passenger Awareness

- **Clear Signs:** "Do Not Bring Plants, Seeds, or Soil Without Certification."
- **Multilingual Brochures:** Simple visuals showing restricted items.
- **Airline Announcements:** Short in-flight messages on long-haul routes.
- **DAFM Campaigns:** Social media posts and seasonal reminders to travellers.



Challenges for Inspectors

Balancing enforcement with diplomacy

Volume

Growing passenger numbers strain resources.

Pressure

Peak hours limit time for thorough checks.

Concealment

Undeclared or hidden plant materials.

Space

Limited inspection areas at busy terminals.

Cooperation at the Airport

01

DAFM Plant Health Division

Leads inspections, risk assessment, and enforcement of plant health regulations.

02

Airline Ground Staff

Assist with passenger communication and reporting of suspect baggage.

04

Airport Police

Ensure security, manage compliance incidents, and support enforcement actions.

03

Customs Officers (Revenue)

Support detection and seizure of prohibited materials at entry points.

Outcomes & Lessons Learned

- Inspections at Dublin Airport reveal important patterns in traveller behaviour and biosecurity risk.
- Each interception prevents a potential pest entry and helps refine future inspection approaches.
- Insights gained drive improvements in communication, enforcement, and teamwork across agencies.

Frequent Findings:
Common items include fruits, seeds, plants, and soil brought for personal use or gifts.

Awareness Gap:
Many cases of non-compliance stem from a lack of passenger awareness, not intent.

Education Priority:
Improved signage, airport announcements, and digital outreach increase compliance rates.

Partnership:
Continued cooperation between DAFM, Customs, and Airport Security enhances overall biosecurity effectiveness.

Conclusions & Future Directions

Passenger baggage inspections are essential to maintaining Ireland's strong biosecurity record.

Vital Safeguard

Inspections protect agriculture, biodiversity, and trade by stopping harmful pests at the border.

Shared Responsibility

Collaboration between agencies and informed passengers ensures lasting biosecurity success.

Continuous Improvement

Investment in technology, training, and risk-based targeting strengthens national plant health protection.

Looking Ahead

Ireland remains committed to protecting its green image and agricultural future through strong prevention at points of entry.

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