

# Zebra Mussel Contaminated Moss Balls in Aquarium Trade- Idaho Response

- ▶ Initial notification at pet store in Seattle, WA
- ▶ Idaho responds immediately
  - ▶ Inspection focused on verification and viability
- ▶ Contaminated product pulled off shelves within 24 hours of verification
- ▶ News release on March 4<sup>th</sup> & March 11<sup>th</sup>
  - ▶ Idaho Legislature
  - ▶ Idaho Stakeholders
- ▶ Follow-up visits to additional distributors
- ▶ Outreach to Idaho pet stores, aquarium owners and stakeholders



## Idaho Discovers Invasive Mussels in Aquarium Products

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's (ISDA) Invasive Species Program announced today the detection of invasive zebra mussels in aquarium products sold in the state. The ISDA has found live, viable zebra mussels in Marimo moss balls which commonly are sold for use in aquariums.

ISDA officials were first made aware of the issue Wednesday and agency personnel immediately responded with in-person inspections. ISDA's response has been part of a coordinated nationwide effort to remove these products from store shelves and advise stores and the public about proper disposal of affected material.

ISDA is working with local Petco store managers to obtain any additional product currently in transit. "Store managers and staff have been very cooperative in this process," said Nic Zurfluh, Invasive Species Section Manager. "They have worked with us, and we are grateful for their understanding."

**What the Public Can Do**  
Do not dump aquarium tank water or dispose of moss balls in natural waterbodies.

- Aquarium owners can safely dispose of the moss ball(s) by one of two methods:
- Remove the moss ball(s) and place in a plastic bag. Put the bag in a freezer and leave for at least 24 hours. After that, the moss ball(s) can be disposed of in the trash.
  - Place moss ball(s) in boiling water for at least one full minute. After that, the moss ball(s) can be disposed of in the trash.

- For moss balls that have already been in an aquarium, the ISDA recommends cleaning the entire aquarium:
- Collect fish and plants and place them in another container. Dispose of the water in a sink or toilet (municipal wastewater is treated to kill pathogens, and septic tanks are fully self-contained underground).
  - Carefully scrub the tank, accessories, rocks, and decorations with a strong solution of chlorine bleach/water. Another option (if you don't want to use chlorine bleach) is to carefully use water that is 140 degrees to flush and coat all the tank and accessory surfaces. ISDA recommends another water change within a week and to continue to monitor the tank for any unusual aquatic growth.
  - For very large aquariums that you may not be able to completely dewater/decontaminate, dispose of the moss ball(s) as above. It is recommended that you do conduct frequent water changes and continue to monitor the tank for any unusual aquatic growth.

"We have always said private citizens are Idaho's best line of defense in protecting our state from invasive species," said Zurfluh. "Once again, we are asking for Idahoans help to keep invasive species from getting a foothold in our state."

P.O. Box 7249 • Boise, Idaho 83707 • (208) 332-8500 • www.agri.idaho.gov

## Idaho Continues Work on Invasive Mussels in Aquarium Products

Since detections of zebra mussels in aquarium products last week, the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) has continued working in coordination with state and federal partners to further identify retail distribution, collect affected products, and ensure proper disposal. This collaborative approach has included several activities:

**Activation of the Columbia River Basin Rapid Response Plan**  
As a standing member of the Columbia River Basin Team, ISDA participates in multi-agency coordination for planning purposes outside of emergencies and also during incidents requiring coordinated response. The CRB Team includes state, federal, Tribal, and university partners which strategize response models and planning for invasive species detections.

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**  
This week, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) assigned enforcement officers to visit pet and aquarium vendors and aquarium product distributors/wholesalers across the country in order to continue the traceback of product origination, retail distribution and sales, and if samples show the presence of zebra mussels. Not all states have invasive species program equipped for enforcement actions, so USFWS activities help to ensure a nationwide response to the issue. USFWS is coordinating with Idaho and other states with invasive species programs to avoid duplication of work. USFWS also is investigating what federal regulations or statutes may have been violated. USFWS is handling any follow-up on possible violations.

Effective March 10, USFWS updated their recommendations for treatment and disposal of moss balls, water, and other affected aquarium material. Again, USFWS's approach must anticipate needs and requirements across the entire country and not just in individual states. ISDA appreciates these new recommendations and considers them the most current and relevant recommendation. Recommendations from northwest states were developed to be consistent with the regional partners, but the new recommendations better address concerns with treatment of water and products before disposal. The new recommendations for Destroy! Don't Dump! can be found on the USFWS website:

- New recommendations specify additional disposal requirements:
  - DO NOT dispose of moss balls in drains, waterways, or gardens. Moss balls must be destroyed and disposed of in a sealed container in the trash.
  - DESTROY moss balls by freezing, boiling, or by submersing in chlorine bleach or undiluted white vinegar.
  - DISPOSE of moss balls and any packaging in a sealed plastic bag in the trash. If vinegar, boiling water, or bleach was used, the liquid can be disposed of down a household drain but never down a storm drain where it could enter and damage local waterways.
  - DRAIN and clean the aquarium using either a hot water or disinfection method, keeping manufacturer recommendations in mind.

P.O. Box 7249 • Boise, Idaho 83707 • (208) 332-8500 • www.agri.idaho.gov

# Regional Response

- ▶ Columbia River Basin Team (CRB) Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) activated immediately
- ▶ Coordination between states and provinces
  - ▶ Disposal methods
  - ▶ Align outreach talking points
- ▶ News release



# National Response

- ▶ Federal Lead- USFWS
- ▶ Relay information to state AIS Coordinators and Law Enforcement
  - ▶ Importers & distributors
  - ▶ Disposal methods
- ▶ National news release





# Wrap up & Jurisdictions

- ▶ State
  - ▶ Immediate response focused on verification
  - ▶ Pulling contaminated product off shelf
- ▶ Regional
  - ▶ Coordination between Pacific Northwest States and Federal Agencies
- ▶ Federal
  - ▶ Primary contact and enforcement with national importers, distributors and retailers

ISDA requesting additional improvements to Federal response process through after action review