BEAGLE TRIO SCOUR TAIPEI AIRPORT FOR FIRE ANTS

News / Airports / Routes

Nine-year-old Snoopy and seven-year-old Miffy are working important jobs at the Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport.

However, instead of searching the baggage claim area for narcotics or banned produce, the two beagles are hunting much smaller prey: red imported fire ants.

The Taoyuan International Airport Corp said the facility now has three beagles working to eradicate red-imported fire ants, which invaded Taiwan a decade ago and are considered a major threat to aviation safety.

The ants can chew up electric wiring, which poses a threat to air navigation facilities, rendering them unable to guide aircrafts' landing and takeoffs, the company said.

The three beagles were trained by National Changhua University of Education's biology department and began working at the airport in 2011, the company said.

To avoid high temperatures, the dogs' four-hour work day begins at 5am and their only days off are over the Lunar New Year holiday.

The company said the dogs are taken each day by their handlers to designated areas to work. The dogs sit down when they find a nest of the ants, and quarantine officers then try to lure the ants out by scattering potato chips around the nest.

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A special type of insecticide is then used to destroy the ants, which does not harm creatures living in the Pushin River and or the ocean waters near the airport, the company said.

When they find a nest, the beagles are rewarded with dog crackers.

The airport has 3,300 manholes and 5,511 air navigation lights, which are potentially hiding places for red imported fire ants, it said, adding that between the beagles and potato chips, the airport has achieved a fire-ant control rate of more than 98 percent.

The cost of the three-year project to exterminate the red imported fire ants is about NT$10 million (US$304,414).

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