

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Assessment of practical experience in the handling, transport and care of animals

Article 9 of the *Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997*, which came into force on 1 July 1997, requires that vertebrate animals transported more than 50km must be accompanied by at least one attendant possessing appropriate knowledge and ability to care for them. This attendant must have received specific training, or have equivalent practical experience. The rules are to be tightened further. From 1 July 1998, anyone who transports cattle, pigs, sheep, goats or horses on road journeys of 8h or more, or on any rail, air or sea journey, will be required to entrust the care of the animals to staff who have demonstrated that they are qualified to manage them and safeguard their welfare. This may be demonstrated by possession of a qualification approved by MAFF, or through assessment of practical experience either by an independent assessor from a body recognized by MAFF, or by the employer. Self-employed people may, at this stage, assess and certify themselves. Consideration is being given to making it a requirement that all staff taken on after 1 July 2000 be assessed by independent assessors.

These guidance notes briefly outline the legal background and describe the points to be covered in each element of the assessment procedure. These include for example: knowledge of the responsibilities of those involved in animal transport; basic knowledge of the animals and their requirements; understanding of when to seek veterinary help; knowledge of how to plan a journey; and an elementary knowledge of the causes of stress in animals and ability to recognize these factors. The framework of expected competencies (Schedule 8 to the *Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1977*) is included as an annex. Another annex provides a list of organizations approved to undertake independent assessments. Finally, a 'Certificate of Competence' form is included for use by employers or independent assessors when assessing employees.

Everyone in the livestock transport industry in the UK has to be aware of the new legal requirements specified under Article 9 of the *Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1977*. These guidance notes explain the background and the necessary procedures in a clear and accessible way. This booklet is essential for employees who will be assessing their staff or themselves.

Assessment of Practical Experience in the Handling, Transport and Care of Animals. Guidance to Employers. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department; Welsh Office Agriculture Department (1998). Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: London. 15pp. Paperback. Obtainable from MAFF, Animal Welfare Division, Government Buildings (Toby Jug Site), Hook Rise South, Tolworth, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 7NF, UK. Free.

Guidelines for minimizing acoustic disturbance to marine mammals from seismic surveys

There has been concern about the possible effects on marine life of acoustic disturbance from seismic surveys and other operations where acoustic energy is released. Modern large-scale surveys are carried out using towed arrays of 'air-guns' – compressed air cylinders which are discharged simultaneously causing a pressure pulse which travels down into the seabed. Little is known about the extent to which these procedures may affect cetaceans. However, being inquisitive and attracted to areas of human activity may increase the risk to these mammals. In the worst case, there is some risk of physical damage if cetaceans are close to discharging air guns, but there is no evidence that this has occurred in UK waters. These guidelines set out procedures to help minimize the risks of acoustic disturbance. Their application is required in some sea areas but member companies of the UK Offshore Operators Association and the

International Association for Geophysical Contractors will be applying them in all waters of the UK continental shelf.

The guidelines cover the planning stage, procedures during the seismic survey, and subsequent reporting. At the planning stage it is necessary to contact the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) for information about which cetacean species may be present and for details of any specific precautions that may be required. The steps to be taken during the survey include a careful visual check for cetaceans from a suitably high observation post, starting 30min before its commencement. Involving experienced sea mammal observers is also urged. Where possible, hydrophones should also be used to help in detection – especially in conditions of poor visibility. The survey procedures should be delayed until 20min after the last sighting. Another important element, where the equipment allows, is to increase the power of the air blasts slowly to enable any animals which may be in the area to move away. Finally, forms are provided for recording information to be fed back to the JNCC to enable further refinement of future guidelines.

Guidelines for Minimising Acoustic Disturbance to Marine Mammals from Seismic Surveys. Joint Nature Conservation Committee (1998). Joint Nature Conservation Committee: Aberdeen. 13pp. Loose-leaf notes. Available from JNCC, Seabirds and Cetaceans Team, Dunnet House, 7 Thistle Place, Aberdeen AB10 1UZ, UK. Free.

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986: ethical review process

In some countries (eg Australia, Canada and the USA) institutional ethical committees, consisting of people with a range of backgrounds, play a major role in regulation of the use of animals in research. Although some organizations in the UK have, in recent years, established committees or other ethical review processes to oversee ethical and other aspects of animal experimentation, there has been no government requirement for this. After debate and consultation on the matter, it has been announced that the Secretary of State now requires that an ethical review process be established and maintained in each establishment designated under Section 6 or 7 of the *Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986* (ASPA). Before 1 April 1999, all such establishments which do not already have viable ethical review processes are now required to develop these, and to explain and test them with ASPA Inspectorate. From that date, a local ethical review process will be required as a standard condition for all work carried out under the ASPA and for breeding and supply establishments.

The aims of the ethical review process are: (i) to provide independent ethical advice to certificate holders (persons licensed to carry out projects under the ASPA), particularly on project licence applications and animal care and welfare standards; (ii) to provide support and advice on these issues to named persons and licensees involved in the work; and (iii) to increase awareness of animal welfare issues and full application of the 3Rs (the principles of reduction, refinement and replacement) through the use of ethical analyses. Certificate holders will be responsible to the Home Office for the running of the process and the appointment of people to implement its procedures. As many people as possible should be involved in the ethical review process and they should include: a named veterinary surgeon; representatives of the named animal care and welfare, and research personnel; and, where appropriate, one or more independent layperson(s).

The document indicates the required framework and an outline *modus operandi* for the local ethical review processes. They should, for example, allow for promoting the 3Rs, cost-benefit