

Animal Care: A New Era in Animal Welfare

Over the past several years, the Animal Care (AC) program within the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has undertaken numerous initiatives to improve all facets of its operations. These initiatives have enhanced the way the program conducts Animal Welfare Act (AWA) inspections and pursues AWA enforcement actions. The initiatives have also affected the way the program enforces the Horse Protection Act (HPA). Below are highlights of some of the major initiatives.

New AWA Inspection Strategy: Quality Over Quantity

In 1997, AC modified its inspection strategy. After 30 years of focusing on conducting as many inspections as possible, the program began performing more in-depth inspections, especially of those licensees and registrants with a history of compliance problems.

The resulting reduction in the overall number of inspections has been accompanied by a substantial increase in the amount of time available for inspecting individual facilities. AC has used this additional time to inspect licensees' and registrants' animals, structures, and records more carefully—an approach that makes better use of AC's inspection resources.

To support this focused inspection strategy, AC implemented a formal risk-based inspection system in February 1998. This system uses several objective criteria, including compliance history, to determine the appropriate inspection frequency for each licensed and registered facility.

Under the system, facilities that meet all of the criteria qualify for a low inspection frequency and are subject to inspections as seldom as once every 2 to 3 years. Facilities that meet few or none of the criteria qualify for a high inspection frequency and are subject to inspections at least every 6 months.

Those in the middle qualify for a medium inspection frequency and are inspected no less than once a year. AC remains committed to inspecting research facilities once a year, as required by the AWA.

New AWA Enforcement Strategy: A Tailored Approach

In 1995, AC launched a new enforcement strategy. Instead of handling all cases of alleged AWA violations the same way, AC now tailors its enforcement approach to best ensure the welfare of the animals.

For licensees and registrants who show an interest in improving conditions for their animals, AC actively pursues innovative penalties that allow the individuals to invest part or all of their monetary sanctions in facility improvements. By doing so, AC enables the individuals to improve the conditions for their animals immediately while the program sends a clear message that future violations will not be tolerated. In the past, most such fines were either suspended or paid directly to the U.S. Treasury, but neither of those results directly improved the plight of the violators' animals.

For those licensees and registrants who do not show interest in improving the conditions for their animals, AC moves swiftly and pursues stringent enforcement actions. Such actions typically include substantial monetary penalties and/or license suspensions, revocations, or disqualifications. They may also include confiscation of the animals and relocation to another location if the animals' suffering is not relieved.

Since launching this initiative, AC has directed more than \$1.5 million in penalties to improve conditions for animals. During the same time period, the program has issued monetary penalties of more than \$2.5 million.

The initiative has also helped AC to reduce the average time for resolving AWA cases from more than 2 years to a little less than 1 year. In addition, AC has avoided the expense of more than 150 administrative hearings, which would have cost USDA an estimated \$1.5 million.

New Approach to HPA Enforcement

In December 1997, AC unveiled its new strategic plan for horse protection. This voluntary plan seeks to increase industry's role in enforcing the HPA. Under the plan, USDA-certified horse industry organizations are given primary responsibility for imposing HPA sanctions. APHIS evaluates the organizations to ensure that they are correctly identifying violations and issuing appropriate penalties. Under this new approach, APHIS pursues substantially fewer formal cases against alleged HPA violators. This allows AC to use its limited resources effectively and enables industry to take the lead in ensuring humane care for its animals. AC continues to work with horse industry organizations to implement this plan.

Performance-Based Management

AC has taken an active role in measuring its effectiveness in meeting its mandate as required by the Government Performance and Results Act. To this end, AC has identified two specific performance indicators: one for animal welfare, the percentage of facilities in full compliance; and for horse protection, the percentage of horses with abnormalities on the front feet. AC has established baseline levels of performance for each of these indicators and goals for improving future performance.

Increased Training for Employees

Since 1997, AC has identified critical enforcement needs and provided training for employees to address those needs. This training has included:

- Care and handling courses for AC employees to improve APHIS' ability to protect elephants. The courses are taught by recognized experts in the field of elephant care and handling and cover such areas as foot care and proper training techniques. The fourth session was held in June 2000. About 80 inspectors and supervisors have completed the training.
- Courses and an inspector's manual for AC inspectors and supervisors on the specific criteria that must be met by dog dealers covered under the AWA.
- Courses and an inspector's manual for AC inspectors and supervisors on the specific criteria that must be met by research facilities covered under the AWA.

Class B Dealer Traceback

Class B animal dealers who supply animals to research facilities typically obtain their animals from pounds and shelters, dog owners who wish to relinquish ownership, and other legitimate sources. Nevertheless, the public is concerned that some of these dealers may be trafficking in stolen animals. AC personnel conduct intensive traceback efforts to ensure that dogs and cats sold by these dealers come from legitimate sources.

Under the AWA, random-source dealers are required to maintain accurate records of the acquisition and disposition of their animals. APHIS' traceback efforts have focused on tracing animals back to the point of origin to make sure records are accurate and complete. APHIS has conducted quarterly inspections of all random-source dealers since the traceback project went into effect in 1993. During that time, AC has issued fines totaling more than \$500,000 and, when necessary, has suspended or revoked licenses.

The results of this effort have been tremendous. From 1993 through 1999, the percentage of random-source animals traced back to their original source increased from a little more than 40 percent to nearly 95 percent. At the same time, the number of class B dealers selling random-source animals has decreased from more than 100 to fewer than 30.

Tethering Outlawed as Means of Enclosure

To improve the well-being of dogs covered under the AWA, AC published a final rule in 1997 that removed from the AWA regulations the provisions for the permanent tethering of dogs as a means of providing primary enclosure. Temporary tethering of dogs as a means of primary enclosure for health or other reasons is still permitted if licensees obtain approval from their AC inspector or AC regional office. But in most cases, licensees must now provide their dogs with a primary enclosure that enables them to move about freely without being tied down.

Wire Flooring in Dog and Cat Enclosures

As of January 1998, regulations began to require that floors in primary enclosures for dogs and cats be constructed of coated wire if the wire is one-eighth inch in diameter or smaller. The coating must be made of a material such as plastic or fiberglass. Regulations also require that any wire floor be constructed so that the floor does not bend or sag. This sturdier construction is less taxing on the animals' feet and joints.

AWA Temperature Requirements

In March 1998, AC revised the AWA temperature requirements to clarify the climatic conditions required for dogs and cats in indoor, sheltered, and mobile housing facilities; in primary conveyances used for transportation; and in animal holding areas of airport terminal facilities. The rules now state that animals covered under the AWA are not to be exposed to combinations of time, temperature, and humidity that would adversely affect the animals' health and well-being. The responsible party must take into account each transported animal's health status, breed, age, and other pertinent factors in assessing the temperature of transport-related facilities.

Additional Information

For more information on the AC program and improvements, please contact us at the address and phone number below or visit our Website at www.aphis.usda.gov/ac.

USDA-APHIS-AC
4700 River Road, Unit 84
Riverdale, MD 20737-1234
Phone: (301) 734-7833
Fax: (301) 734-4978
E-mail: ace@usda.gov

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.