



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service • Legislative and Public Affairs
4700 River Road, Riverdale, MD 20737-1232 • Voice (301) 734-7799 • Web: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov>

Cindy Ragin (301) 734-7280
Angela Harless (202) 720-4623

USDA ESTABLISHES LIVE FISH IMPORT AND INTERSTATE MOVEMENT REGULATIONS TO PREVENT SPREAD OF VIRAL HEMORRHAGIC SEPTICEMIA

WASHINGTON, Sept. 9, 2008--The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) today issued an interim rule, effective Nov. 10, establishing specific conditions for the importation and interstate movement of live fish to prevent the spread of viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS). VHS is a highly contagious disease of some fresh and saltwater fish that is not harmful to humans. The rule will continue to permit the interstate movement of live VHS-regulated fish from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, states where VHS has been detected or that are at immediate risk of being affected, if certain requirements are met to prevent the spread of the disease.

This interim rule follows a Federal Order issued by APHIS in Oct. 24, 2006, in response to the rapid spread of the disease. The Order protected aquaculture facilities by controlling the movement of VHS-susceptible fish species until APHIS learned more about the disease and developed a regulatory program. APHIS worked closely with states, tribes and other interested stakeholders, as well as the Canadian government, when developing this interim rule.

Under this interim rule, the fish must originate in a facility that has conducted laboratory analysis on fish, has been found to be VHS-free and be accompanied by an interstate certification of inspections. Fish moved for slaughter or research purposes can travel without conducting laboratory analysis; however, they must be: transported in a sealed conveyance, accompanied by proper APHIS documentation and transported to a facility that discharges its waste to a municipal sewage system that includes waste water treatment or an approved alternative.

The rule continues to allow live salmonid VHS-regulated fish to be imported into the United States from the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Quebec in accordance with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regulations. It also establishes specific conditions for live non-salmonid VHS-regulated fish to be imported from VHS-regulated regions. The shipment must be accompanied by all proper APHIS documentation, moved in new or properly disinfected containers and inspected by an APHIS official at the port of entry.

VHS-regulated species imported for slaughter or for research must be accompanied by an import permit, as well as be inspected and officially sealed by an APHIS official at the port of entry. The fish must be transported directly from the port of entry to a slaughter or research establishment that discharges its waste water through an approved mechanism to ensure the disease does not spread. Offal, including carcasses, from the slaughter or research facility must be either rendered or composted.

These measures are necessary to prevent the spread of VHS in the United States. Since 2005, this disease has been detected in wild freshwater fish involving large die-offs in several of the Great Lakes and related tributaries in the United States and Canada. Currently APHIS regulates 28 species of fish, but additional species might be added over time.

While VHS detections have been limited to states in the Great Lakes region, APHIS also is seeking comments on developing standardized regulations for the entire United States should it be necessary.

This action was published in the Sept. 9 *Federal Register*. Consideration will be given to comments received on or before Nov. 10. Send two copies of postal mail or commercial delivery comments to Docket No. APHIS-2007-0038, Regulatory Analysis and Development, PPD, APHIS, Station 3A-03.8, 4700 River Road, Unit 118, Riverdale, MD 20737-1238. Comments can be submitted on the Federal eRulemaking portal at <http://www.regulations.gov/fdmspublic/component/main?main=DocketDetail&d=APHIS-2007-0038>.

Comments are posted on the Regulations.gov Web site and also can be reviewed at USDA, Room 1141, South Building, 14th St. and Independence Ave., S.W., Washington, D.C., between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. To facilitate entry into the comment reading room, please call (202) 690-2817.

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