A day in the life - Animal Health Officer

The work of an Animal Health and Welfare Officer is very varied, though primarily involved around the compliance of health and welfare regulations of farmed animals.

The main part of the job is to maintain high standards of animal health and welfare on farms. Farmers have to comply with various pieces of legislation including the Animal Health & Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 and the Cattle Identification (Scotland) Regulations 2007.

There are often calls from farmers who are unsure about how to comply with certain regulations. The Animal Health & Welfare Officer is able to give valuable advice.

Local Authorities are always keen to work with farmers to ensure that the rules and regulations are complied with. After all, both the farmer and the Animal Health Officer want to see healthy livestock on farms. This, in turn, contributes to the integrity and economic sustainability of the Scottish livestock industry.

A typical day can include inspecting cattle and sheep to ensure correct identification (ear tagging) and traceability (passports/record keeping) procedures are followed. This may also lead onto inspecting animals to ensure they are fit for travel, at the likes of a collection centre, prior to them being loaded into transport. There is also a requirement to ensure that all vehicles carrying livestock are properly cleansed and disinfected after offloading animals and before leaving premises either loaded or empty. This is all important in ensuring that any possible disease outbreak is spotted early, but also so that any contacts can be traced quickly, reducing risk of further spread.

To continue to maintain the high standards of animal health and welfare in East Ayrshire, various projects are undertaken. Recently, sheep farms in some East Ayrshire parishes have been visited to ensure that suitable measures have been undertaken to control sheep scab. This is an easily preventable disease that can have a bad effect on the financial state of a business. The vast majority of farmers take their responsibilities very seriously so keeping incidences of the disease to a minimum.

Other visits on farms include dairy inspections to ensure that standards of maintenance and hygiene are maintained; and also feed inspections to check that feed stores and mixing equipment are clean. This is to minimise the risk against any contamination in production from the farm.

There can also be involvement in other animal matters, especially the illegal importation of puppies and the sale of these dogs. Apart from the illegal movement and trade in these pets there is a risk that not only will these animals probably be ill after travelling here, they will not be properly vaccinated and so leading to an increased disease risk, of rabies in particular.

It also a part of the job to be involved in cases with horses and their passports. The passports act as a record of veterinary treatment. This can be important when dealing with horse welfare cases.
Novel Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Novel Psychoactive Substances, or Legal Highs, have been prevalent now for a number of years and are often sold openly in specialised shops known as “Head Shops”. The effect they have when taken, range from severe physical problems to physiological symptoms, and in Scotland they have been implicated in 132 deaths between 2009 - 2013.

The Service has a role to play in regulating NPS products and has been involved in a number of initiatives aimed at curbing the sale of these products. In August 2014, the Service participated in operation Red Wall, in conjunction with Police Scotland. This was a national initiative aimed at disrupting the sale of NPS products and gaining as much intelligence as possible on every aspect of the products.

The Service will continue to monitor this trade by making the best use of all existing legislation to address any identified risk to public health or safety arising from the otherwise lawful sale of such products.

Toy safety

Many people will be looking for the perfect Christmas present for their children at this time of year. There are things that you can look for when buying toys to help avoid the disappointment of something breaking within minutes or, worse still, causing an injury.

The manufacture of toys is tightly regulated to ensure that toys are safe and have the information needed to ensure that they can be bought for an appropriate age and used safely. All toys should be made to these standards but there are always unscrupulous people who just don’t care and so dangerous and counterfeit toys find their way into the marketplace.

The main things to look out for when buying toys are –

- CE mark – this is a declaration by the manufacturer that the toy is safe.
- The name and address of the manufacturer or importer must be marked on the product or packaging.
- Warnings and instructions – these indicate any precautions that need to be taken to ensure safe use. In particular toys not suitable for under three must carry a warning to this effect and state the reason why.
- Outlet – Buy from suppliers with a good reputation.
- Price – Is a price too good to be true? Many of the popular toys are counterfeited and the fakes sold at a reduced price.

You can also do some physical checks yourself.

- Loose pile, fabric or hair can present a choking hazard.
- Small components or parts which come off easily could also choke a child.
- Sharp points and edges or finger traps.
- Loose ribbons and ties, if too long, could be a strangulation hazard.
- Batteries should not be accessible without a tool.

Toy Safety laws are enforced by Trading Standards Officers. If you think you have purchased or seen a toy that is unsafe please contact us.

Trading Standards Scotland

A new innovation for the delivery of trading standards is the formation of Trading Standards Scotland (TSS). TSS is the national trading standards team for Scotland funded by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills. The team is delivered by COSLA, the representative body of Local Government in Scotland. As an integral part of COSLA, TSS is at the heart of policy development for Local Government and will be working and liaising with local trading standards services.

The team comprises three distinct functions: Operations, Intelligence and Coordination & Improvement.

The overarching aim of TSS is to reduce consumer detriment in Scotland by the creation of a resilient and skilled trading standards workforce operating within an intelligence lead framework, all of which is good news for the consumer in Scotland.