PREPAREDNESS FOR NATURAL DISASTERS

ROLE OF THE VETERINARY SERVICES

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According to guidelines for national veterinary services, recently developed by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the objectives for the veterinary services in disaster management are to protect animal health and welfare, safeguard human and environmental health and assist the countries in restoring and enhancing economic and societal conditions. In the guidelines it is also stated that the veterinary services play a leadership role in advising the authorities on animal health, animal welfare and veterinary public health, and that they are responsible for providing input to policies and disaster management plans on these subjects, provide training for private veterinarians and animal owners, and ensure that all stakeholders receive warning information. In line with the guidelines, the veterinary services should also conduct risk analysis to identify hazards, assess the risk and decide on risk management and risk communication. Part of the risk management is to develop contingency plans for each type of event identified by the risk assessment. The guidelines describe the tasks by means of a commonly used disaster management model, which is a cycle divided into four main phases: A mitigation and prevention phase, a preparedness phase, a response phase and a recovery phase.

In recent years, Iceland has encountered several natural emergencies. The hazards connected to the events have been of various sorts; i.e. ash downfall, air pollution, floods, collapsing of buildings etc. The scale of consequences depends not only on the sort of event but also where and when it occurs. The Icelandic Food and Veterinary Authority has developed a generic contingency plan regarding animal health, animal welfare and veterinary public health matters. Specific guidelines for different kinds of events are gradually being built into the plan, based on experiences.