

We all want to be sure that our food is safe. But, we also know that to avoid unnecessary pain and distress to farm animals, they sometimes need to be treated with authorised medicines. We have to balance the use of these medicines and the need to avoid residues in foods. There are internationally set safety limits for residues of the majority of veterinary medicines in food.

Objective 3

To actively monitor the safe use of veterinary medicines authorised in the UK through surveillance of residues and follow-up action where misuse is detected.

To monitor that internationally set safety limits are being observed, the VMD Residues Surveillance Team manages two extensive surveillance programmes. One is statutory, which helps fulfil our obligations under EU law. The other is a non-statutory programme, which complements and supplements the statutory programme.

The Residues Team contributed to ensuring that food was safe by:

- ensuring that the sampling and analysis targets in these plans were met;
- investigating violations found under the surveillance programmes according to standard operating procedures; and
- applying penalties appropriately.

They also contributed to the VMD's financial targets by ensuring that the non-statutory residue surveillance programme operated to budget (more information is available on page 61).

To ensure that they were prepared for surveillance in 2007, they:

- agreed the 2007 statutory residues plan with the European Commission in accordance with the time frame laid down in Council Directive 96/23; and
- agreed the non-statutory plan for 2007 with the Veterinary Residues Committee by 31 December 2006.

Negotiate a position on changes to EU legislation informed by stakeholder views.

The Residues Team contributed to changing EU residues surveillance legislation by taking part in early discussions on a discussion paper. The paper presents points that need to be considered and debated. The Commission goal is to determine new means to balance consumer protection, animal health, animal welfare and trade requirements concerning residues in food producing animals. On the basis of the comments received, the Commission intends to make proposals on the necessary amendments of the Community legislative framework in this sector. The VMD will consult fully with stakeholders in 2007/08 once the Commission has made its proposals public.

CAP cross compliance checks are implemented successfully.

Cross compliance is a series of standards that farmers need to meet in order to receive their subsidy payment in full. One standard relates to restrictions on the use of substances having hormonal or thyrostatic action and beta-agonists in farm animals. The VMD's Statutory Residues on-farm sampling programme contributes to the cross compliance initiative by forming the basis of these checks. In 2006 the VMD provided reports on the number of farms visited and the results of sample tests to the authorities responsible for cross compliance in England, Scotland and Wales. No violations were found.

OFFC requirements are integrated into current operations successfully.

The aim of the OFFC is to create a comprehensive, integrated, risk-based, EU wide, 'farm to fork' approach to official controls. The objective is to improve the consistency and effectiveness of controls across the EU and, as a consequence, raise standards of food safety and consumer protection.
<http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2006/jan/offcguidance>

The VMD contributed to this initiative when members of the Residues Team successfully completed the first audit of the residues control procedures under OFFC requirements. They visited the CEFAS laboratory and accompanied a fish health inspector on residue sampling visits to two farms. They

audited CEFAS against their own internal procedures and the fish health inspector against the VMD's sampling protocols – they found that both met the required standards.

Joint VMD/Environment Agency (EA) programme to reduce pollution from sheep dip agreed and implementation started.

In September 2005 the VMD and the EA convened a meeting of pharmaceutical industry stakeholders, farmers' representatives, conservation groups and the regulatory authorities to determine actions needed to minimise the risk of environmental pollution caused by the use of sheep dips. As a result, a Pollution Reduction Programme for sheep dip was developed. The steering group formed to progress the actions met in August and December 2006, where progress with the programme was discussed. The NFU's "STOP every DROP" campaign launched in August at 'Sheep 2006' was developed as part of the Pollution Reduction Programme. Further meetings are planned for 2007/08.

Change in Veterinary Medicines Regulations to require sheep dippers to possess Certificate of Competence for safe use and disposal of dips.

This initiative was successfully completed as part of the remaking of the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2006 that came into force on 1 October 2006.

Implement strategy for raising public awareness of the regulatory process.

Work to implement a strategy to raise public awareness of the regulatory process will be taken forward in 2007/08 as part of an agency wide communications project. However, the VMD used a variety of ways to raise public awareness of the regulatory process, as described in this report. We also introduced a Communications Plan which sets out for the first time what the key messages are from our 2007/08 Business Plan and how we will communicate them to our stakeholders.

Investigate those involved with the deliberate marketing of illegal veterinary medicinal products including those who knowingly purchase or use unauthorised veterinary medicinal products.³¹

The Enforcement Team aims to protect public health, animal welfare and the environment by seeking to eliminate the use of illegal veterinary medicinal products by reducing the possession, marketing, sale and supply of such products. The team investigated 16 cases in 2006/07, of which 13 related to incidents involving food producing species.

Since the introduction of the Veterinary Medicines Regulations our enforcement policy has been to seize and destroy illegal medicines confiscated by Inspectors. Only where evidence suggests this would not be a sufficient penalty do we pursue with a full investigation leading to possible prosecution. Seizure notices enable the team to seize and destroy illegal products without the need to pursue the costly and time consuming route of prosecution. This measure has the immediate benefit of removing illegal medicines from the market. The details of those persons on whom Notices have been served are published on the VMD website.

In 2006/07 34 Seizure Notices were issued resulting in the seizure and destruction of a wide range of illegal veterinary medicines. Only one appeal against a Notice has been received.

The concept of the Seizure Notice has proved such a useful tool that other agencies are considering replicating it to prevent illegal marketing.

31. You can find out more about successful prosecutions via www.vmd.gov.uk under Publications, MAVIS, MAVIS on-line, Enforcement News

Help the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (RUMA)³² prepare guidelines to encourage the responsible use of veterinary medicines.

The VMD helped RUMA prepare guidelines to encourage the responsible use of veterinary medicines throughout 2006/07. RUMA was established in November 1997 to promote the highest standards of food safety, animal health and animal welfare in British livestock farming. RUMA involves organisations representing every stage of the food chain, facilitating transparency and traceability in the process. RUMA aims to promote a co-ordinated and integrated approach to best practice in the use of medicines.

Work within the EU to develop arrangements for increasing product availability and implement changes that can be applied in the UK.

This is an EU wide issue where the UK cannot act unilaterally. We have taken an active role in EU discussions and focused our work on how we can apply the current rules to improve availability.

As part of the Heads of Medicines Agencies we have agreed an action plan that we will help to implement in future years.

Proposals for interactive SIC applications agreed with site to be available in 2007.

Continue to develop with industry an exemption scheme for products marketed for use in certain non-food species. Full implementation required by October 2007.

We have made good progress on the Small Animal Exemption Scheme³³ and anticipate that full implementation will take place on 1 November 2007. Regular liaison with industry has ensured successful development of the Scheme and has also enabled us to deal swiftly with a number of challenging issues that have arisen. Inspections of manufacturing sites were undertaken by VMD inspectors. Application forms and procedural guidance notes were made available on the internet.

32. You can find out more about RUMA via www.ruma.org.uk

33. Further information about the Small Animal Exemption Scheme can be found at www.vmd.gov.uk under Industry Information

