

REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Assessment of practical experience in the handling, transport and care of animals

Article 9 of the *Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997*, which came into force on 1 July 1997, requires that vertebrate animals transported more than 50km must be accompanied by at least one attendant possessing appropriate knowledge and ability to care for them. This attendant must have received specific training, or have equivalent practical experience. The rules are to be tightened further. From 1 July 1998, anyone who transports cattle, pigs, sheep, goats or horses on road journeys of 8h or more, or on any rail, air or sea journey, will be required to entrust the care of the animals to staff who have demonstrated that they are qualified to manage them and safeguard their welfare. This may be demonstrated by possession of a qualification approved by MAFF, or through assessment of practical experience either by an independent assessor from a body recognized by MAFF, or by the employer. Self-employed people may, at this stage, assess and certify themselves. Consideration is being given to making it a requirement that all staff taken on after 1 July 2000 be assessed by independent assessors.

These guidance notes briefly outline the legal background and describe the points to be covered in each element of the assessment procedure. These include for example: knowledge of the responsibilities of those involved in animal transport; basic knowledge of the animals and their requirements; understanding of when to seek veterinary help; knowledge of how to plan a journey; and an elementary knowledge of the causes of stress in animals and ability to recognize these factors. The framework of expected competencies (Schedule 8 to the *Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1977*) is included as an annex. Another annex provides a list of organizations approved to undertake independent assessments. Finally, a 'Certificate of Competence' form is included for use by employers or independent assessors when assessing employees.

Everyone in the livestock transport industry in the UK has to be aware of the new legal requirements specified under Article 9 of the *Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1977*. These guidance notes explain the background and the necessary procedures in a clear and accessible way. This booklet is essential for employees who will be assessing their staff or themselves.

Assessment of Practical Experience in the Handling, Transport and Care of Animals. Guidance to Employers. Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department; Welsh Office Agriculture Department (1998). Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: London. 15pp. Paperback. Obtainable from MAFF, Animal Welfare Division, Government Buildings (Toby Jug Site), Hook Rise South, Tolworth, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 7NF, UK. Free.

Guidelines for minimizing acoustic disturbance to marine mammals from seismic surveys

There has been concern about the possible effects on marine life of acoustic disturbance from seismic surveys and other operations where acoustic energy is released. Modern large-scale surveys are carried out using towed arrays of 'air-guns' – compressed air cylinders which are discharged simultaneously causing a pressure pulse which travels down into the seabed. Little is known about the extent to which these procedures may affect cetaceans. However, being inquisitive and attracted to areas of human activity may increase the risk to these mammals. In the worst case, there is some risk of physical damage if cetaceans are close to discharging air guns, but there is no evidence that this has occurred in UK waters. These guidelines set out procedures to help minimize the risks of acoustic disturbance. Their application is required in some sea areas but member companies of the UK Offshore Operators Association and the