The Challenge of International Biosecurity:  
the OIE Standards and FAO-OIE Actions

Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin weapons and on their destruction. 
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Dr A. Schudel and Dr J. Pinto
World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE),
12 rue de Prony, Paris, France (http://www.oie.int)

Dr J. Domenech and Dr J. Lubroth  
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO),
Via delle Terme di Caracalla, 00100 Roma, Italy (http://www.fao.org)

Summary

Preventing the spread of disease through international movements is one of the important objectives of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This is accomplished by establishing international standards and guidelines aimed at preventing the importation of pathogens dangerous for animals and humans while avoiding unjustified sanitary barriers, and strengthening veterinary services and capacity building of professionals in improved surveillance, rapid detection and response, and contingency planning. The OIE Standards are contained in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code (the Terrestrial Code), the Manual of Diagnostic Tests and Vaccines for Terrestrial Animals (the Terrestrial Manual), the Aquatic Animal Health Code (the Aquatic Code) and the Manual of Diagnostic Tests for Aquatic Animals (the Aquatic Manual). All OIE Standards are available on-line and are updated annually.

Infectious animal and zoonotic diseases are assuming increasing economic and social importance in the changing farming and trading systems of both industrialised and developing countries. Some emerging or evolving infectious diseases have the potential to quickly spread from local to international significance or to jump species barriers (including to humans). Since 1924, the OIE has been actively engaged since its inception in the prevention and control of the spread of animal and zoonotic diseases. Promoting transparency and understanding of the global animal disease situation, collecting, analysing and disseminating veterinary information, strengthening international coordination and cooperation in the control of animal diseases and zoonoses, and promoting the safety of world trade in animals and animal products remain the main missions of the OIE today. Since 1995 the standards developed by the OIE are recognised by the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

FAO leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy. FAO is also a source of knowledge and a mandate for information collation and sharing on all aspects of agricultural production and soil use. FAO provides assistance to developing countries and countries in transition to modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices and ensure good nutrition for all. Since its founding in 1945, FAO has specifically focussed its activities to the developing rural areas, home to 70 percent of the world's poor and hungry people. Animal diseases, especially those of a high epidemic nature occur commonly in these developing areas, where healthy animal production is crippled, food-protein availability uncertain, and trade opportunities limited. FAO's activities comprise four main areas: Putting information within reach, Sharing policy expertise, Providing a meeting place for nations, and Bringing knowledge to the field. In the field of animal production, the Animal Health Service of FAO focuses its activities in assisting the developing country members to control infectious and parasitic diseases and to prevent their spread to other countries or regions, and provide technical assistance during complex emergencies, such as those posed by civil
war, post-conflict environments, droughts or floods. Current membership stands at 188 with the EU as a regional member.

OIE Standards include procedures for surveillance and prompt reporting of outbreaks of animal diseases and zoonoses; requirements to be met by Veterinary Services for surveillance, chain of command, notification, and early warning and response; requirements that should be met for a country or zone to be defined as free from certain infectious animal diseases and zoonoses; recommendations for the safe importation of animals, animal products, semen, and embryos; procedures for inactivation of infectious agents; and the general provisions that countries should meet to reduce the risk of spread of infectious animal diseases and zoonoses. The Terrestrial Manual and the Aquatic Manual describe in detail the various tests and vaccines to be used in the diagnosis and control of infectious animal diseases. The Terrestrial Manual provides a list of prescribed tests; these tests are required by the OIE for the international movement of animals and animal products and are considered optimal for determining the health status of animals. The Manuals also contain specific chapters on sampling methods, packaging and transport of samples, quality management of veterinary laboratories, tests for sterility and freedom from contaminants, human safety in the veterinary microbiology laboratory, veterinary vaccine production, disinfection and inactivation procedures and laboratory methodologies for bacterial antimicrobial susceptibility testing. Numerous publications from the FAO Animal Production and Health Division are available free of charge that deal with a vast array of issues from good management practices at the farm, how to raise or use a certain species of animal, disease recognition manuals, and resources for developing contingency plans, vaccine quality control and production for the developing countries, etc. FAO also publishes its proceedings on Scientific Sessions, some dedicated to transboundary animal diseases (foot-and-mouth disease, rinderpest, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia). Contributions from the OIE are often, if not always, included in these scientific proceedings and expert consultations.

One of the roles of the OIE and FAO is to support and assist national governments with disease control programmes. A special effort is made to provide capacity building to the Veterinary Services, mainly in transition and developing countries. Both, FAO and the OIE sponsor several regional and, in case of FAO, numerous national animal disease control programmes. The joint FAO/OIE initiative Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Diseases (GF-TADs) with the underlining concept of the worldwide control of diseases and zoonoses at their source was endorsed by the 32nd FAO Conference in December 2003 and by the 72nd OIE General Session in May 2004, which responds to member country and regional organisations that concerted action was needed on a global scale. Within the GF-TADs programme, a specific Global Early Warning System (GLEWS) and response component is envisioned with the participation of WHO for zoonotic and food-borne diseases. The activities of the project are relevant to all regions of the world, but particularly focus on less developed countries.

The standards and the tools currently available through the OIE and FAO are adequate for the protection of Member Countries and of the International Community against the threat of a bioterrorist incident if they are correctly implemented.

Such protection depends on the diligence with which Member Countries follow OIE’s existing guidelines and recommendations for the harmonisation of their legislations and on their capacity to ensure that adequate resources are made available to their national Veterinary Services to function at the central and local levels.

INTRODUCTION

Preventing the spread of animal diseases and zoonoses through international movements is one of the important objectives of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This is accomplished by establishing international standards and guidelines aimed at preventing the importation of pathogens dangerous for animals and humans while avoiding unjustified sanitary barriers and through surveillance, notification and control of diseases.
The OIE was founded in 1924, before the creation of the United Nations. Initially 28 countries united with a mandate to share information on animal disease outbreaks to allow the Member Countries to take the appropriate control methods to protect themselves and to prevent further spread of the disease. There are now 167 OIE Member Countries. Providing a mechanism for prompt reporting of disease outbreaks/occurrences is still one of the primary roles of the OIE.

The FAO is one of the largest of the specialised United Nations Agencies, the mission of which is to develop agriculture, animal productions, fisheries and forestry. In the field of animal production, the Animal Health Service focuses its activities on assisting developing country members to control infectious and parasitic diseases and to prevent their spread to other countries or regions. Livestock are important in supporting the livelihoods of poor livestock keepers, consumers, traders and labourers throughout the developing world. Diseases affecting livestock can have a significant impact on animal productivity and production, on trade in live animals, meat and other animal products, on human health (diseases transmissible from animals to humans), and, consequently, on the overall process of economic development. Activities of FAO Animal Health Service include: the provision of relevant and up-to-date information on the nature, occurrence, effects and impact of selected animal and zoonotic diseases, on means and basic requirements for the control and management of major animal diseases and on the increasingly important area of safeguarding humans from diseases originating from livestock and/or transmitted through the consumption of animal products.

More recently, the OIE and FAO have been strongly committed to convincing national policy makers and international donors that the cost of strengthening Veterinary Services so that they can provide better surveillance, early warning systems and management of epizootics, including zoonoses, is negligible compared with the economic loss resulting from the accidental or intentional introduction of infectious animal diseases and zoonoses.

The OIE objectives and activities for the prevention and control of infectious animal diseases and zoonoses are focused on the following areas. These objectives are also FAO objectives:

- **Transparency in animal disease status worldwide**

  Each OIE Member Country is committed to report to the information department on its health status regarding significant animal diseases and diseases transmissible to humans. The OIE then disseminates the information to all Member Countries to enable them to take appropriate action and to protect themselves. FAO stimulates this obligatory notification and provides tools for disease capture and reporting. Non-member countries are encouraged to report.

- **Collection, analysis and dissemination of veterinary information**

  Using OIE network of internationally recognised scientists, collaborating centres and reference laboratories as well as the FAO network, the OIE collects, analyses and publishes the latest scientific information on significant animal diseases, including those transmissible to humans, especially regarding control and prevention methods. FAO serves as a source of expert advice to OIE groups and committees, as does the OIE serve as international reference in animal health guidelines related to commerce and official reporting.

- **Strengthening of international coordination and cooperation in the control of animal diseases**

  The FAO implements and/or contributes to the implementation of country or regional projects and programmes to prevent and control animal diseases, by strengthening capacities for disease detection, analysis, and reaction (emergency preparedness). With the OIE, FAO provides technical expertise to Member Countries requesting assistance with animal disease control and eradication programmes, particularly in developing countries. These activities are performed in coordination with and in support to other Regional and International Organisations and with donor countries and agencies responsible for supporting and funding the control of infectious animal diseases and zoonoses. Under OIE-World Bank Official Agreement, surveillance of animal disease is recognised as an international Public Good.
Sanitary protection of world trade in animals and animal products while avoiding unjustified sanitary barriers

The OIE develops standards for use by the Member Countries to protect themselves against disease incursions as a result of trade in animals and animal products, while avoiding unjustified sanitary barriers. These standards are developed by experts from Member Countries and from the OIE’s network of 170 Collaborating Centres and Reference Laboratories and in collaboration with FAO and IAEA/FAO Joint Division experts.

In 1995 the standards developed by the OIE were recognised by the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). In order to harmonise SPS measures and remove unjustifiable sanitary or health restrictions to international trade, the Agreement states that governments should use these international standards, guidelines and recommendations. The goal of the Agreement is to minimise the risk of importation of pathogens and to remove unjustifiable sanitary or health restrictions to international trade. The Agreement states that it is the sovereign right of a country to provide an appropriate level of animal and public health protection at its borders. However, this sovereign right is not to be misused for protectionist purposes: an importing country could only apply sanitary measures to imports if a similar level of protection is applied to all imports and internally by the importing country. Members Countries can introduce standards providing a higher level of protection than that provided by the OIE standards if there is a scientific justification, but these standards must be based on a science-based risk analysis.

FAO is in charge of assisting member countries, particularly the developing countries, to implement the international animal health standards, and has undertaken several studies on the cost of compliance to reach the standards placed by world bodies, as well as develop mid and long term policy options for countries in dealing with such standards. Likewise, FAO is committed to develop a systems approach, through capacity building and performance indicators, to assist countries attain compliance and improve trade opportunities.

TOWARDS GREATER TRANSPARENCY IN THE ANIMAL HEALTH SITUATION WORLDWIDE

The OIE is the worldwide observatory for animal health. It is supported in this mandate by FAO. Its key mission is to keep national Veterinary Services and International Organisations informed of the appearance and course of epizootics in any country in the world that represent a threat to animal or public health (zoonoses). The system is based on official animal disease information that the Veterinary Authorities of OIE Member Countries have an obligation to report to the OIE. The use of standard reporting forms ensures that the system is fed with the required data in a standardised format. The strength of the OIE Animal Disease Information System is its ‘legal’ basis defined in Chapters 1.1.2 and 1.1.3 of the OIE Terrestrial Code and in Chapters 1.1.3 and 1.2.1 of the OIE Aquatic Code.

The OIE Animal Health Information System has the following components:

- The International Early Warning System, which consists of an alert procedure to warn of exceptional epidemiological events (natural or intentional) occurring in Member Countries. Information is aimed at decision-makers and other stakeholders to enable them to take the necessary preventive measures. Under this system, the occurrence of a disease or any exceptional epidemiological event, including zoonoses, must be reported as soon as possible to the OIE Headquarters, which then redistributes the information through a variety of channels. Follow-up reports are provided weekly to allow end-users to follow the epidemiological situation as it develops.

- The International Monitoring System, with procedures for gathering monthly and annual animal health data from around the world. Periodical information is collected for all OIE-listed diseases having the potential for rapid spread, adverse economic impact or having a zoonotic potential, while annual information is collected for 130 listed infectious animal diseases and zoonoses.
To improve the transparency of animal health information, FAO and OIE are developing a verification procedure for non-official information from various sources on the existence of diseases outbreaks that have not yet been officially notified to the OIE. (see Appendix I: Chapters 1.1.2 and 1.1.3 of the Terrestrial Code and Chapters 1.1.3 and 1.2.1 of the Aquatic Code). These processes use different sources of information such as diagnostic results from FAO or OIE Reference Laboratories, scientific papers, field projects, newspapers, internet, Global Public Health Intelligence (GPHIN), ProMed, etc.

In order to improve the control of highly contagious diseases, FAO and OIE have recently developed a new initiative, called the Global Framework for the Progressive Control of Transboundary Animal Diseases (GF-TADs). The concept of this initiative is based on a regional and international approach to animal diseases. GF-TADs will improve disease information and epidemiological intelligence. The Global Early Warning System (GLEWS) and response is an integral aspect of the GF-TADs programme. The GLEWS is defined as an instrument to be developed by FAO/OIE/WHO for the international community and stakeholders alike to assist in predicting and preventing livestock animal disease threats through epidemiological analysis and the integration of additional factors that might have an impact on the occurrence and spread of such diseases (e.g., economic factors, civil unrest, climatic changes, etc.). The most important action is to share information on animal health/zoonoses in humans among the three organisations. Results of disease information tracking systems are shared among the three organisations in order to search for additional information for verification purposes. OIE through its verification system would verify information with the Delegate of the Member Country. This will significantly improve the quality of official information. FAO through projects and activities in its Member Countries member countries will verify the reliability of information and work towards improving transparency. Disease tracking at WHO is conducted primarily by the Global Alert and Response Team. However relevant animal health information may also come to the attention of others parties working in the area of zoonotic diseases and veterinary public health.

The activities and expected outputs of the GLEWS can be summarised thus:

- Development of the web-based FAO/WHO/OIE GLEWS;
- Use of designated OIE/FAO Collaborating Centres/Reference Laboratories for specific analysis and modelling trends;
- Dissemination of information that complements the OIE Information System;
- Early warning messages could concentrate on predicting livestock animal disease threats, through epidemiological analysis and integration of additional factors that could have an impact on the occurrence and spread of such diseases;
- Designing control strategies;
- Capacity building;
- Development of coordinated responses to animal health and zoonotic emergencies. If consultation among the three partners shows that there is clear value for onsite assessment of the situation, an urgent field mission could be considered. This joint mission would engage the country authorities, especially those of the Ministries of Health and of Agriculture, to obtain a better appreciation of the situation and offer assistance in the formulation of urgent intervention strategies. The joint mission/experts would be responsible for briefing supervisors and suggesting a course of action (see Appendix II on the CD ROM).

While every effort is made to improve the OIE Animal Health Information System, the major difficulty encountered, as with any international activity, is the quality of the information received, especially information from countries where the resources available for Veterinary Services are inadequate (lack of trained veterinarians/epidemiologists, poor equipment and laboratory facilities, poor involvement of stakeholders in national surveillance systems, absence of disease control programmes, etc). In such
countries potentially dangerous situations might go unnoticed or not be dealt with quickly, thereby increasing the risk of the disease spreading to other countries.

The OIE has a limited source of emergency funds for use in rapidly assisting Member Countries faced with exceptional epidemiological situations. Typically, these funds are used to send experts from OIE Reference Laboratories or Collaborating Centres immediately to assess the epidemiological situation in the field and prepare the actions of national authorities and other international organisations.

The FAO has a well defined mandate to provide assistance to countries in the field of animal health. The FAO, through its Emergency Prevention System-Livestock (EMPRES-Livestock) programme, which became fully operational in 1994, promotes the containment and control of the most serious epizootic diseases of livestock (transboundary animal diseases – TADs), and their progressive elimination on a regional and ultimately a global basis through international co-operation, involving early warning, early reaction, enabling research and coordination. The EMPRES-Livestock programme focuses on the major epizootic diseases (e.g. rinderpest, avian influenza, contagious bovine pleuropneumonia, foot-and-mouth disease, peste des petits ruminants, Rift Valley fever, Newcastle disease, lumpy skin disease, classical swine fever, and African swine fever). Early warning messages with trend analyses and potential implications are posted on the web and distributed via the EMPRES-Livestock mailing list. EMPRES provides assistance in training to national epidemiologists and advises on the setting up of surveillance programmes in the least developed countries. In the event of a disease emergency, EMPRES can also intervene at the request of an FAO member country to assist in combating diseases through FAO’s Technical Cooperation Division. Currently, technical cooperation projects (TCPs) are ongoing in over 40 countries, some with regional approaches to disease surveillance and control. While efforts are made to build capacities in some least advanced countries, what has been achieved so far has to be strengthened in order to better respond to the real needs of many countries for assistance in improving their national surveillance and monitoring systems and bringing their contingency plans to an acceptable level. Furthermore, the available resources to tackle emergency situations and avoid the spread of TADs to other countries have to be dramatically increased.

The warning systems operated by the OIE Central Bureau and FAO Headquarters allow Member Countries to react rapidly if the need arises. A country detecting the first outbreak of an OIE listed disease (see Appendix III), the re-occurrence of a listed disease following a report declaring the outbreak ended, the first occurrence of a new strain of a pathogen, the sudden and unexpected increase in the distribution, incidence, morbidity or mortality of a disease prevalent within the country, an emerging disease with significant morbidity and mortality or zoonotic potential and the evidence of change in the epidemiology of a listed disease (including host range, pathogenicity, strain), must be declared by the corresponding Member Country to the OIE Central Bureau within 24 hours. This information is immediately relayed to the other Member Countries:

- by telex, fax or e-mail to countries directly threatened;
- through the weekly publication Disease Information, available on the OIE Web site or by mail using the OIE distribution list.

Member Countries should also send weekly reports by telegram, fax or e-mail subsequent to a notification as above, to provide further information on the evolution of an incident that justified urgent notification. Periodical notification reports (monthly and annually) are based on data supplied by Member Countries on the presence or absence of animal diseases on the OIE list.

FAO obtains additional information coming from their networks: extensive field activities, Reference Laboratories, rumour tracking (GPHIN, ProMed, etc.). This information and analysis will be communicated to member countries through various channels (FAO-AGA Website, EMPRES Bulletin, direct information, etc.) and to the OIE. An integrated approach to the information systems is currently being developed between FAO and OIE. The GLEWS component of GF-TADs is one of the main answers given to the necessity to better share animal health information. EMPRES capitalises on the Global Livestock Production and Health Atlas (GLiPHA www.fao.org/ag/againfo/resources/en/glipha/default.html) that depicts animal population densities, production systems, soil use, and other layers that aide in disease intelligence, ecological understanding, and development of intervention measures.
These warning systems will provide a worldwide surveillance network for the early detection and rapid reporting of any suspicious disease occurrence that could have its origin in an act of intentional introduction of pathogens (agroterrorism or bioterrorism).

- Member Countries receive alert messages on disease outbreaks or suspicion thereof via fax or e-mail.
- The OIE annual compilation entitled *World Animal Health*, provides a wide variety of information on the animal health situation worldwide and reports on the disease control methods Member Countries apply.
- The FAO-AGA Website, including GLiPHA, and EMPRES publications, give a series of additional information and a global disease intelligence approach, in order to improve the prediction and early warning for highly infectious diseases.

A selection of all this information is integrated into *Handistatus* – a regularly updated computerised database available on the OIE Web site (www.oie.int).

Scientific information is disseminated through other publications, including the OIE *Scientific and Technical Review* and FAO publications, which contains research articles and guidelines of the very highest standard for animal disease control. FAO publishes manuals on specific disease recognition, guides on contingency planning, participatory approaches to epidemiology, and booklets on sample collection and submission.

By collecting, processing and disseminating data on animal diseases throughout the world, the OIE and FAO endeavour to ensure transparency in the animal health situation worldwide for the benefit of its Member Countries. The joint FAO/OIE GF-TADs initiative, with its GLEWS component, is today one of the new approaches to be developed for improved prevention of the spread of highly contagious diseases. The information thus generated is essential for the success of national and regional disease control programmes, and for reducing the health risks arising from international movements and early detection of disease attributable to escape or deliberate introduction of pathogens from acts of bioterrorism.

**TOWARDS IMPROVED HEALTH SAFEGUARDS IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

The smooth flow of animals and animal products requires:

- the development and adoption by the international community of animal health regulations aimed at avoiding the risk of importing and spreading diseases and pathogens transmissible to animals and humans;
- the harmonisation and greater transparency of sanitary regulations applicable to trade in animals and their products so as to avoid unjustified sanitary barriers.

The WTO Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures advocates the use of standards developed under the auspices of the Office International des Epizooties.

Various normative works, approved by the OIE International Committee, are designed to promote the harmonisation of regulations applicable to trade and animal disease control:

- The *Terrestrial Code*, for mammals, birds and bees, developed by the Terrestrial Animal Health Standards Commission, and the *Aquatic Code*, developed by the Aquatic Animal Health Standard Commission. They are updated annually and are available both as an electronic version on the OIE Web site and in a printed version. The Commissions are elected by the General Assembly of the Member Countries of the OIE.
- The *Terrestrial and Aquatic Codes* also have guidelines for disease reporting. These Standards state that Member Countries should proceed according to chapters 1.1.2 and 1.1.3 of the *Terrestrial*
Code and chapters 1.1.3 and 1.2.1 of the Aquatic Code to notify disease occurrence. This information is then forwarded immediately to other Member Countries.

- The OIE now takes a proactive approach to disease reporting and will also report information on confirmed positive results provided by OIE Reference Laboratories (see Appendix IV: Resolution No. XXVIII, 72nd General Session of the OIE International Committee, May 2004) or from unofficial sources, such as scientific publications, ProMed and lay publications after the information has been verified by the Member Country.

The Terrestrial Manual, developed by the Biological Standards Commission, and the Aquatic Manual, developed by the Aquatic Animal Health Standard Commission, presents standard methods for diagnostic tests and vaccine production to be applied notably in the context of international trade and national animal disease control programmes. Both texts constitute the reference standards for the international harmonisation of the diagnosis of animal diseases and vaccine control; they also contain specific chapters on sampling methods, packaging and transport of samples, quality management and biosecurity of veterinary laboratories, tests for sterility and freedom from contaminants, human safety in the veterinary microbiology laboratory, veterinary vaccine production, disinfection and inactivation procedures and laboratory methodologies for bacterial antimicrobial susceptibility testing.

- The OIE Quality Standard and Guidelines for Veterinary Laboratories: Infectious diseases.

This OIE publication describes the standards for the management, biosecurity and technical requirements for laboratories conducting tests for infectious diseases as well as specific details with respect to test method validation, reference reagents and laboratory proficiency testing.

Lastly, the OIE, through the work of the Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases develops and updates lists of countries recognised as being free from some serious diseases, most notably foot-and-mouth disease, bovine spongiform encephalopathy, rinderpest and contagious bovine pleuropneumonia. These lists make a substantial contribution to the health security of international movements.

The FAO plays a prominent role in assisting countries attain OIE standards through various activities such as capacity building, transfer of technologies, expertise and field projects.

ORGANISATION OF THE OIE

International Committee

The International Committee is the highest authority of the OIE. It comprises all the Delegates nominated by the governments of 167 Member Countries (as of May 2004) and meets once a year during the General Session in Paris in May.

Voting by the Delegates within the International Committee respects the democratic principle of one country, one vote.

The principal functions of the International Committee are:

- to adopt international standards in the field of animal health and zoonoses;
- to adopt standards and resolutions for the control of the major animal diseases;
- to elect members of the OIE’s statutory bodies (President and Vice-President of the Committee, Members of the Administrative Commission, Regional Commissions and Specialist Commissions);
- to elect the Director General of the OIE;
- to examine and approve the annual OIE activity report, programme of activities, financial report and budget presented by the Director General.
During the General Session, changes affecting the distribution of the major animal diseases throughout the world are closely monitored.

**Administrative Commission**

The work of the International Committee is prepared by the Administrative Commission.

The Administrative Commission, consisting of the President of the International Committee, the Vice-President, the Past President and six elected Delegates, represents the Committee in the interval between the General Sessions. Members are elected on a geographical basis.

The Commission meets twice a year to examine, in consultation with the Director General, technical and administrative matters, in particular the programme of activities and financial documents to be submitted to the International Committee for approval.

**Regional Commissions**

The five Regional Commissions study specific problems affecting the Veterinary Services and organise cooperation within each of the Regions:

Africa
Americas
Asia, Far East and Oceania
Europe
Middle East

Each Commission holds a meeting every two years in one of the countries of the region to study technical items and regional cooperation on animal disease control.

The Regional Commissions also meet during the General Session of the International Committee. They report to the Committee on their activities and submit recommendations for final endorsement before implementation by the Director General.

**The Director General and the Central Bureau**

The Central Bureau, located in Paris, is managed by the Director General of the OIE. He is elected by the International Committee. The Central Bureau implements the strategies determined by the International Committee and coordinates the corresponding activities in the fields of information, international cooperation and scientific dissemination.

The Central Bureau also provides the secretariat for the annual General Session of the Committee, the various meetings of the Commissions and technical meetings held at the OIE. It also contributes to the secretariat for Regional and Specialised Conferences.

With the help of voluntary contributions from some of the Member Countries, the Central Bureau provides the impetus for activities such as organising regional training seminars and coordinating control programmes.

The Central Bureau has become an international resource centre at the service of animal health (including zoonoses) officials worldwide.

**TOWARDS OBJECTIVE AND IMPARTIAL EXPERTISE IN ANIMAL HEALTH**

The International Agreement of 25 January 1924 establishing the OIE made it responsible for promoting and coordinating research on the surveillance and control of animal diseases throughout the world.
This objective has been attained by the creation of a worldwide animal health network, involving the setting up of Specialist Commissions and Working Groups, the designation of Collaborating Centres and Reference Laboratories, the organisation of meetings of experts and the continuing publication of scientific articles.

**Specialist Commissions**

The Specialist Commissions study problems of animal disease surveillance and control and questions relating to the harmonisation of international regulations.

The Terrestrial Animal Health Standard Commission contributes to the development, in collaboration with other Specialist Commissions, of the generic and specific chapters in the *Terrestrial Code*, promote the adoption by the International Committee of animal health (including zoonoses), animal welfare and animal production food safety standards, guidelines and recommendations concerning the trade or international movement of mammals, birds and bees and their products, and harmonised disease control regulations.

- The Scientific Commission for Animal Diseases contributes to the development of better strategies and methods for animal disease surveillance and control. The Commission convenes groups of specialists of the highest standard, particularly in the event of an animal health emergency or to verify or evaluate the status of Member Countries in terms of specific animal diseases.

- The Biological Standards Commission harmonises methods for the diagnosis of animal diseases and the control of biological products, especially vaccines used for veterinary purposes. The Commission coordinates a programme to develop standard reagents aimed at standardising diagnosis.

- The Aquatic Animal Health Standard Commission collects all available information on disease control methods for fish, molluscs and crustaceans. The Commission harmonises rules governing trade in aquaculture products as well as diagnostic methods. It also organises scientific meetings on these topics.

All the standards proposed by the various specialist Commissions need to be approved by the International Committee before publication. All the standards, recommendations and guidelines of the OIE relating to animal health, zoonoses and international trade in animals and animal products are recognised by the WTO.

**OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres**

These OIE Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres, of which there are 170, covering 92 diseases and topics and located in 31 different countries, provide OIE Member Countries with support and scientific advice on all matters relating to the surveillance and control of animal diseases. This support can take many forms: such as the provision of experts (150 world renowned scientists), preparation and supply of diagnostic kits or standard reagents, seminars, courses, and organisation of scientific meetings.

**Working Groups**

Three OIE Working Groups are currently active:

- Wildlife Diseases
- Animal Welfare
- Animal Production Food Safety

These Working Groups meet to review progress made in their subject field and to ensure that the information is made available rapidly to all OIE Member Countries. They also contribute to the organisation of scientific meetings, seminars, workshops and training courses.
The OIE Working Group most concerned with biosafety and biosecurity is the Working Group on Wildlife Diseases (WGWD).

This Group urges Member Countries to recognise the importance of wild animals as potential reservoirs (and even as targets of deliberately introduced biological agents) when planning responses to outbreaks of disease, exotic or otherwise.

The WGWD has determined that relatively few countries have developed plans for responding to any disease incursions that may affect wild animals. In order to assist OIE Member Countries that may wish to undertake such planning, the WGWD will, in the course of the next 3 years, review preparedness and response plans that may have already been prepared. The Group will identify from these plans the major components and information requirements essential to this planning. The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the OIE International Committee in 2005.

National preparedness for the possible incursion of exotic diseases must include the preparedness of intervention of all the relevant public authorities and stake-holders, the assembly of up-to-date information on the population size, demography and susceptibility of indigenous wild animal species and should include the development of feasible procedures for the early recognition and diagnosis of a disease outbreak, the subsequent prevention of disease transmission between wildlife and domestic livestock and the spread of disease within wild animal populations.

Effective planning for responses to an exotic disease incursion must accord to wildlife the same degree of attention that is now given solely to domestic livestock.

A national consultative network of wildlife expertise should be created and deployed in order to develop a range of techniques that could be used to reduce the risk of transmission of disease from livestock to wildlife (or vice versa) in the event of an exotic disease outbreak.

These actions will establish the necessary databases, lines of communication and science-based plans to achieve a high level of preparedness to deal with an exotic disease incursion into a national wildlife population.

The OIE Working Group on Animal Production Food Safety, established between the OIE and high level representatives of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, is responsible for hazards for consumers likely to occur during animal production (on the farm). This Working Group also covers intentional actions likely to be done on the farm.

During the 72nd OIE General Session, Member Countries recognised that zoonotic diseases are emerging and re-emerging with great frequency, and indicated their overwhelming support for a greater OIE role in confronting the challenges of such zoonoses. They also recognised the need for coordination of activities among animal and public health officials and organisations and vertically through national, state, and local groups. For this purpose Resolution No. XXIX was adopted during the 72nd General Session with a clear indication for including this activity in the fourth OIE strategic plan (2005–2010) and to create an Ad hoc Group on Emerging Diseases with member from the Working Groups on Wildlife Diseases and Animal Production Food Safety, the Ad hoc Group on Epidemiology and other relevant bodies or experts, in particular OIE Reference Laboratories (Appendix V: Resolution XXIX, 72nd General Session of the OIE International Committee, May 2004).

There appears to be little possibility to prevent bioterrorist attacks on domestic animals and to prevent the subsequent spill-over into wildlife populations. Wildlife, too, could be the initial target of covert bio-attacks with consequent spill-back of infection into contiguous domestic livestock.

Our ability to detect and control the spread of disease within and among human and animal populations is increasing, but is still insufficient to counter the existing threats presented by bioweapons, which may include newly recognised and highly virulent infectious diseases of both humans and animals.
Interdisciplinary and international efforts to increase surveillance and identification of disease pathogens and improved mechanisms for interagency and intergovernmental cooperation and collaboration will be necessary to combat the threat of disease agents likely to be used as a bioweapon.

**ORGANISATION OF THE UN and UN FAO**

Reference on the Organisation of the UN can be found under the following address:

http://www.un.org/aboutun/chart.html

Reference to the organisation of FAO and that of the Animal Production and Health Division can be found under the following addresses:

**Structure and Finance:** [http://www.fao.org/UNFAO/about/finance_en.html](http://www.fao.org/UNFAO/about/finance_en.html)


**Decentralised FAO**

- Five Regional Offices for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Near East and Europe;
- Five Sub-regional Offices for Southern and East Africa, Pacific Islands, the Caribbean, North Africa and Central and Eastern Europe;
- Five Liaison Offices in Geneva, Washington D.C., New York, Brussels and Yokohama; and
- Seventy-eight Country Representations covering all 187 member countries (and EU).

The **Animal Production and Health Division** is divided into:

- Animal Health Service (Parasitic Diseases, Veterinary Services, and Infectious Diseases / EMPRES)
- Animal Production Service (Animal genetic Resources, Feed Resources, and Livestock Production)
- Livestock Information, Sector analysis and Policy Branch (Policy; Livestock, Environment and Development, and a Pro-Poor Livestock Policy Facility).


In addition there are a few FAO Commissions of interest.

The **European Commission for the control of Foot-and-Mouth Disease** (EUFMD Commission) was established in 1954 at a time when Foot-and-Mouth Disease was ravaging post-war Europe, as a special body under Article XV of the basic texts of the Organisation.

The Commission is primarily a forum to foster cooperation between member countries and to co-ordinate their efforts to prevent and control FMD. It also provides technical expertise, epidemiological information and advice to member countries, assists in the development of international standards and harmonisation, and provides support for FMD control in areas which endanger the status of the member countries.

The **Animal Production and Health Commission for Asia and the Pacific** was established by the 60th Session of the FAO Council and became operational in 1975.

The purpose of APHCA is to promote livestock development in general; and more particularly, to promote national and international action and research programmes relating to animal husbandry and health problems, including transboundary animal diseases (principally foot-and-mouth disease, avian influenza and classical swine fever); to build up regional and national livestock programmes based on collective self-reliance and mutual assistance within the Region; to promote livestock production as an industry and as part of the farming system based on self-reliance at the farm level; and to raise the
level of nutrition and living standards of small-farmers and rural communities through optimal exploitation of resources for livestock development.

The Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture is a permanent forum where governments discuss and negotiate matters relevant to genetic resources for food and agriculture. The main objectives of the CGRFA are to ensure the conservation and sustainable utilization of genetic resources for food and agriculture, as well the fair and equitable sharing of benefits derived from their use, for present and future generations. The Commission aims to reach international consensus on areas of global interest, through negotiations.

The CGRFA deals with policy, sectorial and cross sectorial matters related to the conservation and utilization of genetic resources for food and agriculture. It develops and monitors the Global Strategy for the Management of Farm Animal Genetic Resources; and the Global System for Plant Genetic Resources.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The standards and the tools currently available through the OIE and FAO are adequate for the protection of Member Countries and of the International Community against the threat of a bioterrorist incident if they are correctly implemented.

Such protection depends on the diligence with which Member Countries follow OIE’s existing guidelines and recommendations for the harmonisation of their legislations and on their capacity to ensure that adequate resources are made available to their national Veterinary Services to function at the central and local levels.

In order to achieve the above:

- The OIE standards designed to control disease and to prevent the introduction of pathogens should be used as a basis for the harmonisation of legislations. Comprehensive livestock sector development, which includes production, health and policy, are hallmarks of the FAO Animal Production and Health Division as mandated by the Ministries of the member countries.

- The OIE guidelines relating to the biosecurity of laboratories, based on expertise provided from researchers in human and animal health, are recommended for the safe management of biological agents used in those laboratories.

- OIE and FAO Member Countries should comply with the OIE guidelines, standards and recommendations and EMPRES principles relating to surveillance and prompt notification of diseases (including zoonoses) of domestic livestock and wild animals.

- An improvement in the quality and efficiency of Member Countries’ Veterinary Services will guarantee vigilance in disease monitoring, surveillance and early warning, early detection, and will ensure a timely and rapid response to any emergency.

It is plain therefore that effective global biosecurity can only be achieved if all OIE and FAO Member Countries conscientiously comply with the standards and guidelines of the OIE, effectively train stakeholders and ensure the availability of adequate human and material veterinary resources.

Many countries share a common concern about the natural occurrence or deliberate misuse of biological pathogens that could affect public health, food and animal production. Existing methods of disease prevention and containment, regulations, international guidelines and standards are being extended at both national and international levels to improve the ability of countries to prevent, manage and recover from natural, accidental or deliberate introduction of animal diseases. In this regard there are, at present, substantial differences among countries in the perception of national threat from the deliberate use of pathogenic biological agents.
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FAO Animal Health Manual 8 – Manual on livestock disease surveillance and information systems
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FAO Animal Production and Health Paper 145. New Technologies in the fight against transboundary
animal diseases (1999)

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FAO Vaccine Manual – The production and quality control of veterinary vaccines for use in developing
countries (1997)


OIE Quality Standard and Guidelines for Veterinary Laboratories: Infectious Diseases, First Edition
(2002)

OIE web site

APPENDICES (Electronic version included in a CD with the paper and the PP)

I Chapter 1.1.2 and 1.1.3 of the Terrestrial Code and Chapter 1.1.3 and 1.2.1 of the Aquatic Code

II OIE/FAO Agreement, OIE/WHO agreement, FAO/OIE GF-TADs agreement

III Manual for disease notification

IV Resolution XXVIII, 72nd General Session of the OIE International Committee, May 2004

V Resolution XXIX, 72nd General Session of the OIE International Committee, May 2004