

RESTRICTED – DRAFT (19 April 2001)

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

MEASURES TO REDUCE RISK TO PUBLIC HEALTH FROM SLAUGHTER AND DISPOSAL OF ANIMALS - GUIDANCE

Foot and Mouth Disease rarely transmits to people and causes only minor illness when it does. Large scale slaughter and disposal of animals as part of the control of the current epidemic of Foot and Mouth Disease necessitates measures to reduce any impact on public health. These must be addressed as part of the control strategy. Those responsible for determining and carrying out policy on slaughter and disposal at local level must adhere to the following guidance which is aimed at reducing risks to human health.

1. **Carcasses should be disposed of quickly**

Animal carcasses left to decompose on the ground pose a potential risk to land and surface water from certain micro-organisms and, in the case of older cattle, from Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy. Time from slaughter to definitive disposal should be kept to a minimum. Priority should be given to the disposal of cattle born before 1 August 1996.

2. **Identification and segregation of older cattle**

Cattle born before 1 August 1996 should be identified prior to slaughter. They should be segregated from other animals and their carcasses disposed of quickly (see below). Where there is uncertainty about the age of cattle they should be assumed to be in the older group and disposed of accordingly. **See detailed MAFF guidance in Annex 1.**

3. **Disposal of the carcasses of older cattle**

Cattle born before 1 August 1996 should be disposed of by rendering or incineration. When this is not possible they should be burnt on pyres subject to an appropriate local risk assessment. **See detailed MAFF/JCC guidance in Annex 2.**

4. **Burial of sheep, younger cattle and other animals**

Sheep, cattle born after 1 August 1996 and other animals can be buried but only in sites approved by the Environment Agency on a case by case basis. Informal or impromptu burial of carcasses is not permitted. Older cattle must not be buried under any circumstances (see 3 above). **See detailed guidance from Environment Agency in Annex 2.**

5. **Disposal of ash from burned or incinerated animals**

Ash should be disposed of safely in approved landfill sites agreed in advance of disposal with the Environment Agency. **See detailed guidance from Environment Agency in Annex 3.**

6. Pyres

Burning organic material on pyres generates large amounts of the air pollutants found in other situations. Only particles and sulphur dioxide are likely to pose any threat to health. Dioxin is also produced but concentrations fall away as distance from the pyre increases.

Small pyres

Small pyres (250 cattle, or their equivalents burning over 3 days) should be built according to the guidance attached, generally more than 2km from local communities. Closer to the pyre, those suffering from asthma may experience a temporary worsening of their condition. Such effects will be reversed using standard medication. People less than 0.5km from pyres will be exposed to high concentrations of irritants including sulphur dioxide and particles: such exposure should be avoided by all those suffering from asthma.

Large pyres

Larger pyres (1000 cattle or over) should generally be 4km or more from local communities and built according to the attached guidance. Dioxins will be deposited on plants and on the ground downwind of pyres. Levels of dioxins in the ground and on plants should be monitored before the area is used, again, for grazing.

Detailed information is contained in a report on air quality *Effects on Health of Emissions from Pyres Used for Disposal of Animals* produced by the Department of Health in Annex 4. Detailed guidance on the use of materials for pyres from MAFF is contained in Annex 5.

7. Implications for the human food chain

Fruit and Vegetables

Dioxins deposited onto plants decay over a matter of weeks due to weathering and 'dilution' due to growth. Therefore deposition from pyres is likely to have no long-term effects on dioxin levels in plants. It is probable that many people living in the vicinity of the pyres will grow fruit and vegetables in their gardens. The usual preparation processes of washing, removing outer leaves or peeling should remove deposited dioxins. Dioxins in the soil are not translocated into growing crops and therefore pose no immediate or long term hazards.

Grazing Animals

For similar reasons grazing animals should not be reared on land down wind of the pyres for 6 months for a small pyre. For larger, or continuous pyres, monitoring dioxins concentrations of soil and plant/grass will be necessary before ground close to the pyre can be used again for grazing.

The Food Standards Agency is planning to monitor food and other samples from around larger or continuous pyres to ensure that there are no long-term effects on food safety.

RESTRICTED – EXECUTIVE**Annex D****DISPOSAL OF LIVESTOCK CARCASSES****DRAFT MEDIA HANDLING STRATEGY**

It is vital that Government is seen to be firmly in charge when a widespread cull and subsequent disposal of carcasses becomes inevitable. The decision to use mass burial sites must be firmly rooted in the Executive with the collective support of all Ministers. The inevitable media appetite for information must be addressed with the dissemination of information in a controlled and effective manner.

An emergency situation requires extreme measures. If the use of burial sites is required in the fight to combat FMD, it will be seen as a significant development, made necessary by the increase in the numbers of livestock affected with the virus.

There is no way in which this news can be given a positive gloss to make attractive reading or viewing. Our priority should be to educate public opinion on the Executive's reasons for deciding to use burial sites, supported by guidance and factual information on the health risks associated with such sites. In order to do that it will be important for the Executive to have been seen to have addressed and dismissed the vaccination option. Charges will be made that the Executive may be putting the economy before public health and environmental and solid answers will need to be given to counter such charges. Evidence from GB so far is that that will not be easy. Addressing public health concerns is central to this media strategy. These concerns will be exacerbated if we are to transport carcasses through areas currently unaffected by FMD to central burial sites.

This cross departmental media strategy sets out key responsibilities and actions that may be required if the Executive decides to use burial sites for livestock carcasses. As with the Civil Service generally, a redirection of EIS resources will be required to respond effectively to this situation.

RESPONSIBILITIES

- The Deputy Director EIS, supported by the EIS Central Press Office, will have the general day to day responsibility for the co-ordination of media handling with regard to the disposal of livestock carcasses.
- DARD Press Office will continue to co-ordinate the general day to day media activity relating to their department's work on the eradication of FMD.

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- DHSSPS Press Office will respond to media enquiries relating to public health and safety issues from FMD.
- DOE Press Office will respond to media enquiries relating to environmental issues such as contamination of water tables and regulations for the control and maintenance of burial sites.

All Departmental Principal Information Officers must ensure that their staff channel all media enquires relating to these topics directly to the office concerned in order to maintain a consistent line in the media.

MEDIA HANDLING STRATEGY

This media handling strategy highlights three stages:

- the announcement of burial sites
- the preparation and commencement of use of burial sites
- the ongoing use of burial sites until they are formally sealed

STAGE ONE – ANNOUNCEMENT OF BURIAL SITES

DAY ONE

Following the meeting of Executive where a decision on the use of burial sites is confirmed, preparations will be made to release this information to the media and general public the following morning. This time delay allows for practical preparations and briefing phone-calls to be made to key personnel.

Contractors to commence final preparation work on burial sites immediately.

DAY TWO

Briefing of MLAs affected by location of burial sites by FM, DFM and Minister for Agriculture. Phone calls to local MPs and MEPs. Minister for Agriculture to contact Chairman of the Assembly Agriculture committee, MAFF and ROI authorities.

Contact made with appropriate Director of Public Health in the area health boards. Briefing of representatives of the farming industry including UFU and NIAPA.

Press Conference by First Minister, Deputy First Minister and Minister for Agriculture announcing decision by the Executive to use burial sites for the disposal of livestock carcasses.

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Accompanying press release outlining number of burial sites, capacity and location details. FM and DFM to emphasise the necessity for the Executive to make such a decision.

Minister for Health, Chief Medical Officer and Deputy Chief Medical Officer available for interviews on lunchtime bulletins to support Executive decision and to minimise public safety fears.

Off the record media briefing for key journalists and senior news editors hosted by Deputy Director EIS and appropriate officials.

Minister for Environment/EHS officials will be available for evening media bulletins to allay concerns over environmental pollution.

Identify DETI Geologist who will be available on request for media interviews to provide factual information on siting of burial sites.

DAY THREE

Article placed in Belfast Telegraph by First Minister and Deputy First Minister allaying public safety fears about burial sites

Distribution by Royal Mail of leaflet to households in immediate vicinity of burial sites highlighting need for this action, based on only a limited number of geological and environmental options available in Northern Ireland. Emphasise the minimal nature of health and public safety risks for those living nearby and offering a telephone helpline (DHSSPS to provide?) for further information.

Minister for Agriculture to be made available for lunchtime media interviews to note progress already achieved in preparation of sites.

Adverts to be placed in provincial papers affected by location of burial sites for publication the following week, highlighting the minimal risk to the public from such burial sites.

If media are still focussing significantly on negative aspect of burial sites, First Minister and Deputy First Minister should be made available for interview on evening radio and TV bulletins to reinforce the need for this action to be taken. Promote this option in contrast to large burning pyres releasing dioxins directly into the atmosphere and the health risks from leaving large numbers of culled livestock in agricultural fields.

DAY FOUR

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First Minister and Deputy First Minister conduct separate telephone interviews with provincial papers in localities of burial sites highlighting the need for this course of action in what are exceptional circumstances. [subject to publication dates]

Press release issued by Department of Health reinforcing minimal risks from burial sites to public health and safety. Quotes from Minister for Health and Chief Medical Officer.

STAGE TWO – PREPARATION AND COMMENCEMENT OF BURIAL SITES

In advance of press announcement by First Minister and Deputy First Minister on Day Two, and following discussions with local councils, each of the locations for the burial sites must be secured by contractors and access to public denied. This will limit before and after comparisons of each location. Contractors would need to ensure that each burial site is appropriately screened from media cameras in the surrounding area to minimise distressing pictures of the disposal of animal carcasses.

Officials should make contact in advance with local Police to discuss arrangements in case of public protest against location of sites. EIS Press Officers should visit each site to ensure that media access is limited.

A Press Officer should ideally be present at each site for the first three days of commencement work. This will ensure that media access to the perimeter of the site is controlled and that information is available locally for those media outlets who arrive on site to record pictures. Press Officers from MOD/RUC Communications Unit could possibly support this task.

Lines to take will provide Ministers with responses to local opposition to burial sites, emphasising burial as the safest option for disposing of animal carcasses on this scale.

If there is strong local opposition to burial sites officials might consider holding meetings with representatives from local communities to discuss.

The Deputy Director will chair daily meetings of EIS staff (representatives from other agencies such as RUC/MOD may join the group as required) and assess media coverage. He will recommend what action is necessary by way of rebuttal to challenge inaccurate publicity and misleading claims presented in the media.

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STAGE THREE – ONGOING USE OF BURIAL SITES TO CLOSURE

DARD Press Office and EIS Central Press Office will make available daily statistics where appropriate regarding the operation of burial sites.

DHSSPS and DOE Press Office staff will continue to deal with reactive inquiries from media organisations relating to public safety concerns from use of burial sites.

Contractors and local DARD officials should be provided with contact telephone numbers for departmental press offices in case local difficulties arise from media or protestors on site.

DARD issue press releases on final closure of burial sites highlighting site monitoring plan for groundwater, surface water and leachate. Effective odour and vermin control plans should also be indicated.

SPOKESPERSONS

The First Minister and the Deputy First Minister will represent the views and decisions of the Executive, supported by Minister for Agriculture if appropriate. The Minister for Agriculture will continue to represent her department in the co-ordination of the fight against FMD supported by the Chief Veterinary Officer and the Permanent Secretary. The Minister for Health will address public health concerns surrounding burial sites in the media supported by the Chief Medical Officer and the Director of Public Health from the appropriate area Health board.

CONCLUSION

This media strategy allows accurate, factual information to be delivered to local communities close to burial sites at the earliest opportunity. This will reduce the uncertainty about the minimal public health risks associated with mass burial sites.

It is not possible to put a good gloss on this subject. However, by presenting the facts surrounding the issues arising from the use of burial sites in an educational, open and constructive way, the general public will at least understand the exceptional circumstances that have led the Executive to make this decision and will be reassured by the views of experts where appropriate.

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ANNEX A – ANNOUNCEMENT PRESS RELEASE

ANNEX B – KEY LINES TO TAKE

ANNEX C – Q & A

ANNEX D – PUBLIC INFORMATION LEAFLET TEXT

ANNEX F – ARTICLE FOR BELFAST TELEGRAPH (FM/DFM)

KEY ACTIONS

- Immediate preparation of information for Annexes A – F
- Contact with Royal Mail to confirm 48 hour special arrangement for distribution of leaflets to postcode areas
- Preparations by DHSSPS to set up information help line for persons with public health questions

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