



Module 35

The World Organisation for Animal Health and its Role in Animal Welfare

Lecture Notes

Slide 1:

This module was created by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) with assistance from World Animal Protection.

Slide 2:

This presentation covers information about the structure of the OIE including its global outreach and capacity including specialist commissions. It also covers the key role of the OIE within the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement). The later points describe the way OIE sets its standards, and last but not least the presentation covers OIE and its role in animal welfare.

Slide 3:

The need to fight animal diseases at the global level led to the creation of the Office International des Epizooties through an international agreement, which was signed on January 25th 1924. In May 2003 the office became the World Organisation for Animal Health but kept its historical acronym OIE.

The OIE is recognised as the organisation that sets international standards for animal diseases and zoonosis by the SPS Agreement. The SPS Agreement sets out the basic rules for food safety and animal and plant health standards, i.e. how governments can apply health measures to imported goods to the extent necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health whilst avoiding unjustifiable trade barriers. It allows countries to set their own standards, but it also says that regulations must be based on science. Member countries are encouraged to use international standards, guidelines and recommendations where they exist (e.g. OIE standards). However, members may use measures which result in higher standards if there is scientific justification.

In 2012, the OIE had a total of 178 Member Countries. The OIE maintains permanent relations with more than 50 other international and regional organisations and has 11 regional and sub-regional offices on every continent.

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Since it was created, the OIE has played a key role in its capacity as the sole international reference organisation for animal health, enjoying established international recognition and benefiting from direct collaboration with the Veterinary Services of all its member countries. As a mark of the close relationship between animal health and animal welfare, the OIE has become, at the request of its member countries, the leading international organisation for animal welfare

Slide 5:

The organisation is placed under the authority and control of the World Assembly of Delegates consisting of delegates appointed by the governments of all member countries.

The day-to-day operation of the OIE is managed at the headquarters situated in Paris under the responsibility of the director general who is elected by the World Assembly of Delegates. The headquarters implements the resolutions passed by the International Committee and developed with the support of Specialist Commissions elected by the delegates:

The highest authority is the world assembly of delegates.

The OIE has five regions and the representations in each region are:

- Americas: Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Europe: Sofia, Bulgaria
- Africa: Bamako, Mali
- Middle East: Beirut, Lebanon
- Asia, Far East and Oceania: Tokyo, Japan

There are also six sub-regional representations:

- Central America: Panama City, Panama
- Europe: Brussels, Belgium
- North Africa: Tunis, Tunisia
- Eastern Africa and the Horn of Africa: Nairobi, Kenya
- Southern Africa: Gaborone, Botswana
- South East Asia: Bangkok, Thailand

Slide 6:

The role of the OIE's Specialist Commissions is to use current scientific information to study problems of epidemiology and the prevention and control of animal diseases, to develop and revise OIE's international standards and to address scientific and technical issues raised by members.

The OIE is continuing to improve the transparency of its standards development process, in order to have the best scientific basis for its standards and to gain their widest possible support. All reports from OIE Specialist Commissions are published on the OIE public website and incorporate the accepted reports from relevant OIE Working Groups and ad hoc groups as appendices. The OIE does not officially solicit comments on these reports except from delegates, but will not refuse comments from organisations with an interest in the OIE's work, as they often represent a very useful source of information.

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The OIE does not have the mandate to police the implementation of its standards. Rather, it encourages members and supports them in their efforts by providing technical advice and, within the resource limitations of the organization, capacity building for Veterinary Services (VS) and Aquatic Animal Health Services (AAHS).

The animal health codes are primarily aimed at the protection of global animal health, and the prevention of the spread of pathogens to animals through international trade.

These codes are referenced in a number of modules throughout this resource. The following two slides briefly list where standards relating to animal welfare have been included.

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The OIE, through the adoption of these standards, encourages its 178 Members to implement them for humane treatment of animals in such key areas as livestock transport, slaughter, and killing for disease control purposes, as well as for the control of stray dog populations and the use of animals in research and education.

Slide 9:

The Veterinary Services are key players in improving animal health and welfare and implementing the standards recommended in both the terrestrial and aquatic codes..

Slide 10:

The animal welfare working group's aim is to use a non-biased science-based approach to development of global standards, and in accordance with practice and science, to make key proposals for future OIE engagement in animal welfare. They are in regular communication with the OIE expert collaborating centres to identify research needs and encourage collaboration.

Slide 11:

In this slide we discuss OIE activities in relation to animal welfare standards.

Slide 12:

The first regional animal welfare strategy has been developed in the Asia, Far East and Oceania region. It serves as guidance to governments of the member countries for implementation of the OIE animal welfare standards. An implementation plan based on the regional strategy has been developed as well.

Every two years in each region the OIE organizes training seminars for national animal welfare 'Focal Points' – government officials responsible for an animal welfare agenda. These seminars update the Focal Points with developments in animal welfare both within the regions and globally.