

RESPOC TRADING STANDARDS REVIEW

IMPORTED FOOD - BORDER CONTROL

INTRODUCTION

Staff and Location

- 1.0 The imported food team is based in Cargo Village at Heathrow and is located in offices on the 1st floor of building 550 (WFS Shed) in Shoreham Road East Heathrow. The officers are at the heart of all imports in the cargo area of Heathrow Airport, and all administrative functions and data bases are controlled from this office.

The Team consists of the following three team leaders:

- Team Leader imports of Products of Animal Origin (POAO)
- Team Leader imports of Non POAO
- Team Leader Airport Environmental Health

Within the Team there are three full time Official Veterinary Surgeons (OVS) who deal with the clearance of Veterinary products (Meat, semen, hunting trophies etc)

There is a team of three administration staff; eight Environmental Health Officers and Eight Technical Staff Who are shared jointly by the three team leaders for imported food control as well environmental health functions at Heathrow Airport.

The Imported Food Service is provided for 16 hours a day from 8am to midnight, 7 days a week with call out cover after 12 midnight.

Controls on imported food are carried out in all the transit sheds at Heathrow Airport and physical checks and identity checks on imported food of POAO are carried out at two inspection centres which are approved by the European Union. One is located at the back of the United Airlines shed within the cargo area called Euro Bip and the other at Hatton Cross called the BA Bip. Officers staff these two centres during normally working hours from 8am to midnight.

CURRENT PROCESSES

What is Port Health

- 2.0 Port health in general terms refers to the Health matters at a port which can either be a seaport or an airport and relates to matters such as,

Imported Food Controls and include:

- Control of infectious disease (prevent entry and control at port) including human as well animal disease and control of all disease vectors
- Inspection of aircraft and vessels.
- Control and inspection of food premises and safe water supplies
- Other Environmental Health matters including health and safety.

Association of Port Health Authorities

- 2.1 The London Borough of Hillingdon is responsible for all of Heathrow Airport and as such, acts as the Port Health Authority for Heathrow Airport, and carries out enforcement and control of matters under the international Health Regulations as well as EU directives on range of health matters.

The authority is a member of the Association of Port Health Authorities (APHA).

The Association of Port Health Authorities is the only UK wide organisation representing the interests of Local Authorities and Port Health Authorities with responsibilities for health controls at sea and airports. Port health authorities are constituted with the primary objective of preventing the introduction into the country of dangerous epidemic, contagious and infectious diseases and ensuring the wholesomeness of imported food.

There are currently 69 members of the Association who can be found throughout the UK. Members actively work with the Association in sharing their expertise and best practice to deliver consistent and effective port health services.

The Association plays an important role in protecting public health through liaison with Government departments and agencies, local

authorities and internationally through the EU, the World Health Organisation and trade bodies. It contributes significantly to national and international policy development and keeps its members up to date with changes in legislation and guidance.

The Association is directed by an elected Executive Board and has a number of technical committees dealing with the various areas of port health work.

APPENDIX 2B

As an officer of LBH, I have been an elected member of the Executive Board for the past 3 years representing the interest of airport member authorities on the Board. In addition I am the chairman of the APHA airport committee and also the Joint Under Secretary of the APHA looking after the Border Inspection and Imported Food Committees of the association. As such I attend regular meetings with central government bodies such as Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Food Standards Agency (FSA), Health Protection Agency, World Health Organisation, Department of Health and the European Commission.

The Senior OVS is the Secretary of the APHA Border Inspection committee and the Team Leader for Airport Environmental Health is the Committee Secretary of the APHA Overview and Scrutiny committee.

Work with the UK Border Agency (UKBA)

- 2.1 Port Health officers attended another Operation Codex 3 joint exercise with UKBA on the 27 November 2009. The operation began at 15.00hrs and concluded at 19.30hrs. The operation involved using a “food detection dog” within the transit sheds at Heathrow, to assist in locating illegal imports of Products of Animal Origin.

This was the first exercise of its kind involving port health and UKBA in which a food detection dog was employed.

Although the joint operation did not uncover any illegally imported Products of Animal Origin, two consignments of unfit food products that had been left behind by importers were detected and the transit shed operator instructed to dispose of them by port health.

DISPOSAL OF WASTE/DESTRUCTIONS

- 2.2 Consignments of products of animal origin may fail any stage of veterinary checks for a number of reasons. If a consignment fails veterinary checks it is refused entry and may need to be destroyed. This needs to be done as a controlled process to ensure that these products do not find their way back on to the open market.

Consignments are destroyed when:

- an agent/importer has given immediate written consent for a consignment to be destroyed, or
- a notice, preventing the consignment being released, has expired or
- the consignment presents a risk to animal or human health and there is no option to re-export

APPENDIX 2B

There are two border inspection posts at Heathrow. When a consignment is ready for destruction, it is moved to a specially constructed freezer within the relevant Border Inspection Post. These freezers are used exclusively for the storage of consignments destined for destruction. This prevents any risk that the consignments could contaminate foods destined for free release. All movements of consignments due for destruction are supervised by an officer from the Imported Foods Unit.

Periodically, the consignments are removed under supervision and incinerated. To this end, the Imported Foods Unit use a licensed waste contractor, Vet speed Ltd, (trading name NOVUS ENVIRONMENTAL) A505, Main Road, Thriplow Heath, nr Royston, Herts. SG8 7RR.

Waste products are loaded into the vehicle under the supervision of officers of the Imported Foods Unit. The vehicle is then sealed and the products are subsequently incinerated at Vet speed's plant in Hertfordshire. A certificate of destruction is issued after incineration. This confirms that the products loaded into the vehicle at the border inspection post are those that were incinerated. Periodically the vehicle is followed to ensure compliance.

A similar procedure is in place for foods of non animal origin that fail public health checks. For the period Jan 09 – Dec09 approximately 44,729 tonnes of products of animal origin were destroyed and 1717 tonnes of foods of non animal origin.

THE LEGAL STATUS OF KHAT

What is Khat?

- 3.1 Khat is a green-leafed shrub that has been chewed for centuries by people who live in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian peninsula. It turned up in Europe, including the UK, a few years ago and is used particularly among emigrants and refugees from countries such as a Somalia, Ethiopia and the Yemen.

It remains potent for only a few days after picked. It is strongest when the fresh leaves are chewed but can also be made into a tea or chewable paste.

The law

The khat plant itself is not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act although the active ingredients, cathinone and cathine, are Class C

APPENDIX 2B

drugs. Cathinone may not be lawfully possessed or supplied except under a licence for research, though cathine may be prescribed. It is controlled by law in countries such as America, Canada, Norway and Sweden.

Khat can be legally bought in Britain with no restriction of the age of the purchaser. About seven tones of it are estimated to pass through Heathrow Airport alone each week.

Currently there is no legal requirement for importers to notify the Imported Food Office of khat imports arriving at Heathrow Airport. Irrespective of this, on the 26 September 2009, the Border Control Team conducted surveillance checks within several transit sheds surrounding Heathrow. During the surveillance checks, six consignments of khat were physically inspected and subject to analysis.

The laboratory reports likened khat to tobacco rather than food, because the product is chewed to extract the juices and the residue spat out.

The matter was raised with the Food Standards Agency who adopted the same line as the laboratory report. As a result, there is currently no enforcement action that can be taken until status of the product is clarified.