



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service • Legislative and Public Affairs
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USDA RELEASES SAFETY REVIEW OF WILDLIFE DAMAGE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

WASHINGTON, Aug. 4, 2008--The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) today released a safety review of its Wildlife Services (WS) program. The review evaluates WS' current safety policy and procedures and identifies improvements to ensure that the work environment is as safe as possible for employees.

"Employee safety is extremely important to APHIS," said Cindy Smith, APHIS administrator, "and we sought this review to ensure our existing safety protocols were effective in protecting the welfare of our employees."

APHIS initiated the review in June 2007 to ensure that its policies and procedures allow for the safest working environment for its employees who routinely conduct work with inherent risks. Although WS completed 12 separate safety reviews of individual programs during the last few years, this is the first comprehensive assessment of WS activities.

The review, conducted by outside subject-matter experts, looked at nine areas within the WS program, including aviation, explosives and pyrotechnics, firearms, hazardous materials, immobilization and euthanasia, pesticides, vehicles, watercraft and zoonotic diseases.

"I am pleased to say that the review found that WS' protocols overall are successful in this regard, and the program has already started to implement many of the review's recommendations to further improve the safety of our employees," continued Smith.

The review found that WS safety procedures are extremely effective in protecting the health of its employees, as well as the fact that the program has a successful safety record given the work performed by employees.

For example, reviewers noted that the WS explosives program "could serve as a model for other agencies or groups looking to improve their own program" and recommended only "relatively minor safety and security issues."

The review contained a variety of recommendations ranging from revisions of policies and directives to identifying alternatives for staff communications and training. Two key recommendations already implemented include the selection of an experienced aviator as the national aviation coordinator and receiving the Gold Standard Certification for aviation safety. This certification verifies that APHIS meets or exceeds Federal Management Regulation standards and recognizes a commitment to aviation safety.

WS is establishing priorities for implementing more complex recommendations, as well as those that could require funding. A comprehensive training institute, computerized tracking systems for training and materials and integrating technologies that can improve employee safety are among these recommendations.

The complete report entitled *Wildlife Services Program Safety Review: Evaluation of Current Safety Program and Identification of Safety Improvements* can be accessed on-line at www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage.

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