

Background and Context

Avian Influenza was diagnosed in turkeys in rearing sheds at a multi-operation site at Holton, Suffolk. The site owner was Bernard Matthews, a high-profile multi-national operation. All turkeys at the site were culled. All persons coming into contact with the infected birds were offered health screening. Restriction and surveillance zones were enforced from 2 February to 12 March 2007. Domestic and wild fowl within the surveillance zone were monitored for signs of disease.

How the Topic was Handled

Unlike most other emergencies, in an exotic animal disease outbreak, a central government department is directly responsible for both the national and local response. This is because an outbreak has the potential to spread rapidly and quickly become a national issue. In accordance with EU legislation, a Local Disease Control Centre (LDCC) led by a Defra Regional Operations Director (ROD) is established at the local Divisional Office (AHDO) of Animal Health, an executive agency of Defra, to manage the outbreak. Defra's National Disease Control Centre (NDCC) is established in London to provide strategic direction to the disease control operation. Key local stakeholders (eg. Local Authority trading standards officers, Environment Agency, HPA, etc) involved in managing the disease outbreak are represented in the LDCC.

In this outbreak as described above, the State Veterinary Service (SVS - now Animal Health) was the lead agency and they created a Local Disease Control Centre (LDCC) at their regional offices at Southgate Street Bury St Edmunds.

Suffolk Trading Standards were advised by the SVS at 19.15hrs on 1 February 2007 of a possible Avian Influenza or Newcastle's disease outbreak at the Bernard Matthews site in Holten near Halesworth Suffolk. Samples were taken at 10:00hrs on 2 February and Avian Influenza was confirmed by 22:00 hrs on 2 February.

By 01:00hrs on 3 February, a briefing took place at Martlesham Police HQ attended by trading standards, the Suffolk County Council communications team, the Director of Public Protection and Suffolk police. At this time, both the Suffolk Resilience Forum Exotic Diseases Contingency Plan and the Suffolk Trading Standards specific Avian Influenza Plan were activated.

By 04:00hrs, Trading Standards staff were woken and asked to report to Endeavour House. By 05:00hrs, Trading Standards staff started to arrive to man the Trading Standards control area at Endeavour House, Ipswich. Soon after at 06:30hrs, Police arrived at the Holton site to secure the perimeter and set up a mobile Police unit. At 07:30hrs, Trading Standards and Communications Officers arrive at the Holton site to deal with the media interest that was rapidly building.

In London, officers from LACORS attended the Defra National Disease Control Centre (NDCC) meetings (the NDCC was strategically managing

the outbreak) and liaised with Suffolk Trading Standards and all local authorities on current developments and policies. At 12:00hrs on 3 February, confirmation was received that the avian influenza outbreak was H5N1 at which time Emergency Planning established the County Emergency Centre (CEC) on the ground floor of Endeavour House. Also at 12:00hrs a Strategic Co-ordination Group (Gold) meeting was held at Martlesham Police HQ during which representatives from all the major agencies involved met to agree an initial response. Soon after this, at 13:00hrs, the SVS held their first bird table meeting at the LDCC with government representatives and local agencies to ensure a co-ordinated government response to the disease outbreak.

At 14:00hrs, the first AI Declaratory Order came into force placing controls on poultry keepers, such as the housing of all poultry within a 3km and 10km protection and surveillance zone. During that afternoon, Environment and Transport and Trading Standards met to map the legally required 3k and 10k restriction zones. The positioning of the signs was agreed and the available stock of 40 road signs started to be deployed on major roads by 15:00hrs that afternoon.

At 09:00hrs on 4 February, the second Declaratory Order came into force creating a wider restricted zone covering from Lowestoft to Woodbridge extending out to the A140 Ipswich to Norwich road. The Fire Service started to deliver letters to all known poultry keepers in the zones. Trading standards also started to make visual checks within the surveillance and restriction zones to ensure poultry were correctly housed.

An update meeting took place that afternoon in the CEC during which representatives from each of the directorates attended to ensure they were up to date with the situation so far. The duty director attended to allow corporate decisions to be made straight away.

By late afternoon, the transport operation, managed from the LDCC as in the response to all disease control issues, was underway. Officers from trading standards, district councils and other agencies escorted the lorries, loaded with the dead birds from the site in Holton to a slaughterhouse in Staffordshire.

During 5 February, Suffolk County Council started to print and post 92,000 letters advising all residents and businesses within the controlled zones of the restrictions placed on them as a result of the outbreak. At 11:00hrs, Trading Standards and SVS staff started to conduct door-to-door enquiries to identify all poultry keepers within the Protection zone. This exercise took two days.

During February, officers from trading standards continued to visit and inspect poultry premises in all three AI control zones. The SVS bird table meetings were gradually reduced as the extent of the outbreak was confirmed and controlled.

Throughout the outbreak, the Health Protection Agency advised on human disease issues and allocated anti-viral drugs to personnel that may have come into contact with infected birds. The Health Protection Agency was represented at both the LDCC and the NDCC. Customer Services Direct

assisted with IT and the manning of the Avian Influenza help line. Other agencies involved were neighbouring Local Authorities that sent Trading Standards officers to man the Trading Standards control area and help in the LDCC, and the RSPCA that assisted by rounding up stray poultry.

On 12 March 2007, all restrictions were lifted after no further outbreaks of AI were discovered within the control zones.

Costs

Currently the estimated additional costs for Suffolk County Council Trading Standards for dealing with the Avian Influenza outbreak are:

- Signage - £6000
- Mailshot - £23000
- Equipment - £3575
- Additional mileage - £2000
- Overtime - £16000
- **Total = £50,575**

Lessons Identified

1. Response to animal diseases is, by necessity, a fast moving operation. Before this outbreak was confirmed, Suffolk had 1 day to contact local stakeholders and prepare. Agencies must consider bringing in staff to make preparations if notified of a suspect case outside of normal office hours.
2. During an outbreak, it is vital to manage the media. Whilst in this outbreak some media interviews were given at the site, media interviews are NOT encouraged at infected premises so as not to hamper operational matters by encouraging a large media presence. Media do head to sites where activity is occurring and Defra will send a Government News Network (GNN) press officer to supervise and disseminate information, but responding organisations should not encourage the media by providing a spokesperson at the scene. All media interviews should be conducted from the LDCC and no portable media facilities should be provided at the site.
3. During the initial response to the outbreak, it became apparent that some equipment and IT services were not available during the weekend. Telephone recorded messages were not accessible and the Trading Standards IT system was not available overnight. Agencies should ensure that all necessary equipment, IT services and personnel are always available.
4. Suffolk Trading Standards had a specific plan for dealing with Avian Influenza with agreed processes and procedures for undertaking the known tasks for an Avian Influenza outbreak. Contingency plans should be written in a way that allows individual tasks to be easily identified and allocated, and all plans should be written to complement the Defra/Animal Health Exotic Animal Disease Contingency Plans

Contacts for Further Information

Animal Health, Animal Health Divisional Office

100 Southgate Street
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP33 2BD
Tel: 01284 778150
Email: A.H.Bury-St-Edmunds@defra.gsi.gov.uk

Suffolk Police

Suffolk Constabulary Headquarters
Martlesham Heath
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP5 3QS
Tel: 01473 613500

Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit

B3GF
Endeavour House
8 Russell Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP1 2BX
Tel: 01473 265321
Email: emergency.planning@epu.suffolkcc.gov.uk

Consumer Direct

2nd Floor, Kings Court
Stevenage
Hert's
SG1 2TP
Tel: 01438 737249
Email: eecg@consumerdirect-eastofengland.gov.uk

Suffolk Health Protection Unit

PO Box 170
South Building South Building
Foxhall Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
Tel: 01473 329000
Email: suffolkHPU@hpa.org.uk

Environment Agency

Eastern Area Office
Cobham Road
Ipswich
Suffolk
IP3 9JE
Tel: 08708 506506

Highways, Environment and Transport, Highways Management

Central Area Highways Management

Central Area

Lodge Lane

Gt Blakenham

IP6 OJE

Tel: 01473 588701