

# ASSOCIATION OF PORT HEALTH AUTHORITIES

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Please reply to:

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Mrs M. Robertson  
Scottish Executive.

Dear Mrs Robertson

The Association of Port Health Authorities (APHA) has a membership of 64 PHAs and Local Authorities with Port Health functions, throughout the UK. However we are also responsible for system of liaison networks, which bring together local authorities with smaller ports. (e.g. the Scottish Ports Liaison Network SPLaN) APHA's vision is to be the lead agency in promoting Port Health in the UK by assisting our members in the provision of consistent, high quality services for the protection of public and animal health. We promote consistency amongst member authorities by developing policy, enforcement guidance, and identifying and disseminating good practice. We also support and promote effective co-ordination, co-operation and collaborative arrangements between local authorities with port health functions.

The Association has worked closely with the Food Standards Agency, the Maritime Coastguard Agency and LACORS to produce a memorandum of understanding governing the interaction between local authorities and national bodies when dealing with problems on ships. With the new International Health Regulations and the recent work undertaken with regard to norovirus outbreaks on ships, it is likely that the MoU will be expanded to include the Health Protection Agency in the near future.

Among the foremost areas of work are:

## **Animal and Public Health, animal movements and identification**

Port Local Authorities are responsible for the enforcement of veterinary checks carried out on products of animal origin (POAO) imported into the European community from third countries those outside the European Union. Border Inspection Posts are designated by the European Commission and these are staffed and operated by PLAs, which work closely with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Food Standards Agency Scotland (FSAS) the State Veterinary Service (SVS), and her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Although the latter are responsible for controlling smuggled POAO, PLA's are the

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local competent authorities for ensuring that public and animal health is controlled at the borders.

## **Imported Foods**

Whereas inland local authorities monitor imported foods as part of their general food safety controls, for PLAs, this is a core function, and as with products of animal origin, the legislation is now governed by European Regulations. PLAs have powers to detain foodstuffs while sampling and analysis are carried out, so that they are well placed to prevent contaminated foodstuffs entering the country. It is at the ports, therefore, where imported food can be effectively controlled and if necessary prevented from entering the distribution chain.

## **Notification/Prevention of Infectious Diseases**

Vessels and aircraft with a planned destination in the United Kingdom have a duty to report to the PLAs all cases of infectious disease occurring on that vessel or aircraft in transit. The PLA in close collaboration with the Health Protection Agency will assess such incidents and determine the risk. On arrival in this country the appropriate actions to prevent the spread of infection and to safely manage the situation will be undertaken speedily. The PLAs have powers to prevent anyone boarding or leaving a vessel or aircraft unless control measures are in place to prevent the spread of infection. This is a fundamental step in preventing the entry of novel and /or potentially dangerous pathogens into the United Kingdom. Where there is a need to exercise the legal instrument the Maritime and Coastguard Agency will also be involved. A robust structure should be in place to undertake this work at ports and airfields whenever such action is necessary.

## **Safety and Wholesomeness of Foodstuffs**

Although LA's main remit in connection with this area relates to imported foods, there are also producers, processors and markets within PLAs areas. In particular, PLAs are responsible for monitoring shellfish beds in coastal areas for microbiological contamination and biotoxins. When necessary, shellfish beds are closed by PHAs and harvesting of specified shellfish is prohibited until such time as the hazard is controlled.

## **Additional Functions**

- 1) International Health Regulations 2005 – The Executive is working to implement this legislation by way of amendment to existing Public Health Regulations. For the purposes of infectious disease control at the country's borders, these Regulations are essential, but they will also introduce a new record of ship inspections; the "ship sanitation control exemption certificate/ship sanitation control certificate". These will be used from June 2007 on a global basis, Port Health Authorities and Local Authorities with port health functions will be the enforcement authorities in the UK.

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I would stress because of the nature of the functions undertaken by Port Local Authorities we consider that the Port Health function should be a priority and would be best served at local authority level with the correct funding in place. This would draw together the priorities of animal health, imported food and infectious disease control and show that the Executive is committed to strengthening animal and public health at our borders.

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

*John L. Craigs*

Hon. Secretary Environmental health and Hygiene Committee