

May 12, 2004

Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS – AVIAN INFLUENZA DISPOSAL

Who is responsible for disposal of the birds?

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency has the over-all responsibility for eradicating the outbreak.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries is responsible for providing options for the safe disposal of poultry carcasses and waste from flocks that have been infected. CFIA and MAFF select the disposal sites.

As the statutory regulator for waste disposal in British Columbia, the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection ensures that disposal does not result in air, land or water contamination. WLAP reviews disposal options for each proposed site. If the site is appropriate the ministry issues the appropriate permit or operating certificate amendment.

The Solicitor General has responsibility for British Columbia's emergency response programs. The Provincial Emergency Program provides coordination for the joint federal provincial response once a state of emergency is declared.

The Ministry of Health Services, through regional health authorities and the BC Centre for Disease Control, is responsible for assessing and responding to any threats to human health.

How many flocks are infected?

As of May 12, 2004, forty-one of an estimated 600 commercial poultry flocks in the Fraser Valley have tested positive for avian influenza. All infected premises in the original high-risk region have been depopulated of poultry by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

The poultry carcasses must be safely disposed of in ways that minimize the risk to the public and to other poultry.

How many carcasses have to be disposed of?

As of May 12, 2004, the total number of birds that have been or are being euthanized is approximately 15,271,623. Birds left to be disposed is at 17%.

How are the carcasses destroyed?

The avian influenza virus is very vulnerable to heat. It is destroyed quickly at relatively low temperatures – much lower than the temperature of boiling water (e.g. 30 minutes at 55 degrees Celsius).

Disposal options presently being used for flocks positively identified as having avian influenza are:

- Biological heat treatment, stabilize, manage as compost
- Incineration
- Landfill

Which method works best?

Heat-treated, on-farm composting has been used for almost half of the birds that have been destroyed to date.

Intensive efforts by government, industry and local officials are going on to expand the use of composting. This has made it possible to reduce or eliminate the need to use landfills to dispose of carcasses.

However, the number of carcasses that need to be disposed of at any given time remains unpredictable. Because of this, government needs to have the option of land-fill disposal as a last resort.

The Provincial Emergency Program brings extra resources to this task. Our objective now is to speed up the total depopulation of poultry in the Fraser Valley and bring this crisis to a rapid close.

How does composting work?

The preferred option is to destroy the virus through biological heat treatment of the infected carcasses at the farm. Almost half the flocks that have tested positive for the virus have been dealt with in this way.

The dead birds and litter, such as woodchips or sawdust, are layered in the barns, most of which have steel walls and concrete floors. The layered pile is dampened and aerated. Air and moisture feed microbes that in turn give off enough heat to kill the virus.

The virus is destroyed after 30 minutes at 55 degrees Celsius. As an extra safety measure, the farms are required to keep the material at that temperature for three days. The treated material will be fully decomposed. It may then be safely used as fertilizer.

Chicken manure also contain the virus, and will be biologically heat-treated as well. This is being done on the farms.

What is the central composting facility?

A large Abbotsford dairy farm is being used as a central site for the composting of birds that test negative for Avian Influenza (AI).

The site, located on agricultural land near Highway 11, is well situated for the composting. It is also large enough to handle necessary machinery and the material to be composted.

The location and composting operations meet or exceed all health and regulatory requirements. Ag-Bag® sealed environmental composting bags are used in the controlled composting process, to prevent the production of objectionable odours.

The choice of the central composting location followed full discussions involving the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Fraser Health Authority, poultry industry representatives, the ministries of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries and Water, Land and Air Protection and the City of Abbotsford.

Central composting is being used to provide increased capacity and is in addition to incineration and on-farm composting currently being used in this disposal effort.

What is the process for central composting?

Canadian Food Inspection Agency representatives identify a barn with birds that test negative for Avian Influenza. The birds are slated for destruction and disposal.

The barn is encased in plastic sheeting.

Carbon dioxide gas is introduced into the barn to euthanize the birds.

Twenty-four hours later, carcasses and other organic material in the barn – like manure, wood chips and straw – are collected and transported to the secure central composting site.

Additional wood chips, sawdust and straw are added to speed composting.

All material for composting is sealed in environmental and recyclable composting bags (Ag-Bag[®]) that limit potential odour.

All material is composted and cured for one to three months at the secure site, which is supervised continuously.

At the end of this period, fully composted material is ready for use as organic fertilizer.

Isn't incineration a better disposal method?

Incineration is effective but facilities are limited. The incinerators at Similco Mine in the Princeton area can handle 30,000 carcasses a day. The GVRD Waste-To-Energy facility in Burnaby has been tested and may be able to handle a similar daily amount.

Testing is done to confirm that air quality remains satisfactory, operational requirements are met and that the incineration is thorough and does not present any unanticipated environmental impacts.

Incineration is our second choice to composting, but capacity is the issue. In order to dispose of the carcasses in a timely manner we must have the option of landfilling some of them, if need be.

If there aren't enough incinerators, why not burn the chickens in the open – like they did with BSE cattle in Europe?

Unlike BSE, Avian Flu is an airborne virus. Open burning of carcasses and waste presents a far greater risk of virus spread and an unacceptable level of air pollution.

Isn't it risky to transport infected carcasses?

CFIA and the provincial Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries have worked with the B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, local medical health officers and local governments to develop protocols that ensure safe collection, transportation and disposal of infected poultry, and the health and safety of workers.

Carcasses to be transported are placed into double containers to protect against leakage. All trucks containing infected carcasses are followed by a vehicle with spill-response capability if needed.

What about birds in the control area that aren't infected?

Flocks that are not affected by avian influenza are being depopulated. Most of the birds are going to processing plants for distribution to the marketplace across Canada. Flocks that are not marketable, such as spent laying hens, will be rendered. None of these flocks will be replaced with new birds until the entire valley is declared disease-free.

How have other jurisdictions dealt with avian flu? Is the use of landfills a common practice?

In a similar crisis in California, 3.5 million birds were landfilled at five sites. The Netherlands also used landfills extensively following an outbreak of avian flu.

Who sets the procedures?

The protocols for handling, transporting and disposing of the carcasses and waste are developed and approved by health, environmental protection and other experts from the federal and provincial governments, regional health authorities, regional districts and municipalities and the industry.

What about aquifers? Who is testing them? Are they a transmission source for this strain of Avian Flu?

The relevant aquifers were tested in March. Test results have been provided to the CFIA, Health Canada and the Provincial Officers of Health. There is no indication that aquifers are a transmission source for avian flu.

Where can I find more information?

ON THE WEB:

Canadian Food Inspection Agency	www.inspection.gc.ca
Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries	www.gov.bc.ca/agf
Provincial Emergency Program	http://www.pep.bc.ca
Provincial Health Officer	www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/pho/
Fraser Health Authority	www.fraserhealth.ca/
Health Canada	http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca

BY PHONE:

Canadian Food Inspection Agency toll-free line for public questions – 1-800-442-2342

Canadian Food Inspection Agency Media Questions – 1-613-228-6682 (24-hour pager line)

Health Canada Avian flu line: 1 800 454-8302

BC NurseLine – Toll-free in BC 1-866-215-4700, or in Greater Vancouver 604 215-4700
Deaf/Hearing-impaired Toll-free in BC (TTY) 1-866-889-4700

*You can consult a registered nurse 24-hours a day.
Language translation services are available on request in 130 languages.*

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Contact: **Province of British Columbia**
1-800-663-3456