



Media arrangements during the outbreak of an agricultural pest or disease



Pests and diseases can impact heavily on Australia's agricultural and associated industries, the environment, people's health and the economy.

The foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in the United Kingdom in 2001 alerted countries to the importance of communication in responding to an agricultural emergency. In Australia, the equine influenza outbreak in 2007 demonstrated the importance of communicating with the public to help contain and eradicate the disease.

The media is a key partner that can provide news and help the community to respond to biosecurity incidents.

This document describes how government authorities and industry respond to agricultural pest or disease (biosecurity) incidents, in order to control them and, where possible, eradicate the pest or disease. It also provides guidance to the media about quarantine/biosecurity laws, and how the media can play an important role in helping the community during such incidents.

Media access to affected properties

For the purpose of controlling a pest or disease, it is critical that the media and unauthorised people do not enter quarantined premises. Doing so could threaten containment, control and eradication efforts, and place the community and affected industries at considerable risk. Any unlawful entry into a property will be referred to local police.

Pests and diseases, whether animal, plant or those that affect the environment, can easily and unknowingly be carried on clothes, shoes, in people's hair, on jewellery, vehicles and equipment such as cameras, microphones, bags, etc.

The incident's Public Information Manager will assist the media, where possible, to obtain images/footage. Depending on the biosecurity risk, he/she may seek authorisation for one media crew to access an affected property, and pool the images with other outlets.

You should note that strict biosecurity measures, including cleaning and disinfecting, will take place when entering and leaving an infected property. This process could damage camera equipment.

How can the media help?

At the start of a biosecurity incident there are several **urgent** messages that the community needs to know:

- **Keep away** from infected or at-risk properties.
- **Keep clean** – biosecurity and hygiene measures are critical at all times (visit farmbiosecurity.com.au for more information).
- **Keep watch** for signs of the pest or disease and report suspect animals or plants to the relevant national hotline:
 - Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline: **1800 675 888**
 - Exotic Plant Pest Hotline: **1800 084 881**
- **Keep informed** about what's happening in your area. Visit outbreak.gov.au for the latest information and links to social media channels.

At the onset of a biosecurity incident, the media should not assume that the property owner who first reported the pest or disease is the original source of the outbreak. It is important that the media use caution when reporting to ensure there is no implication that a particular person/business is at fault. By reporting the pest or disease, this person will have enabled authorities to respond sooner than would otherwise have occurred and, in doing so, their action may ultimately save the lives of a large number of animals and the jobs of many people.

Biosecurity incident response arrangements

When an exotic pest or disease is found, the state or territory government authority takes immediate action to quarantine the affected premise(s) and apply movement restrictions. They trace the movement of people, animals, produce, vehicles and equipment on and off the property in order to limit the spread of the pest or disease. A number of secure laboratory tests are undertaken to determine the exact type of pest or disease, which will assist with treatment and management.

Where the pest or disease is contained within one state or territory, the affected jurisdiction (often called the 'combat' state or territory) takes the lead in responding to the incident. Response activities are coordinated through a Local Control Centre (LCC) and a State Coordination Centre (SCC). Where the pest or disease occurs, or is likely to occur in more than one jurisdiction, the Australian Government Department of Agriculture will coordinate the national response from a National Coordination Centre (NCC).

There are agreed biosecurity incident plans and procedures in place to ensure that the response is managed consistently across Australia. These plans and arrangements can be used in all types of biosecurity incidents, regardless of whether the pest or disease affects animals (including aquatic), plants or the environment (including marine). The majority of biosecurity incidents that occur in Australia affect plants or animals.

Quarantine zones and restrictions

Quarantine zones and movement restrictions are critical steps in helping to contain a pest or disease, and the zones are enforceable by law.

In a biosecurity incident, individual properties, localities and regions will be identified as particular areas or zones. These are described below.

Infected Premise (IP) is a property where a pest or disease has been identified. If more properties are identified as infected, they are numbered accordingly, that is IP1, IP2, etc. This property is quarantined and access is restricted to authorised biosecurity personnel who have a specific role in controlling the incident, and who undertake the necessary biosecurity procedures before entering and leaving the property.

Suspect Premise (SP) is the temporary classification of a property that contains a susceptible plant(s) or animal(s) not known to have been exposed to the disease agent but is showing clinical signs similar to the case definition, and requires investigation.

Trace Premise (TP) is the temporary classification of property that contains a susceptible plant(s) or animal(s) that tracing indicates may have been exposed to the disease agent, or contains contaminated plant or animal products, waste etc, and requires investigation.

A Restricted Area (RA) is a larger area around an IP, typically including all properties within a 10 km radius, which is secured by road blocks or check points. People are discouraged from entering the RA unless they have a legitimate need to do so. It is not necessary for the media to obtain approval from authorities to enter the RA, however media personnel are asked to stop at the check point to get the latest information on any movement restrictions within the RA.

The Control Area (CA) would normally be a very large area in the first few days of an outbreak. Movement restrictions within the CA apply to animals, but not people, however, vehicles may be stopped at check points where authorities will look for anything that might spread the pest or disease.

Restricted airspace

The media must not use helicopters to film infected properties, especially during an animal disease outbreak. Low flying aircraft will scare and scatter livestock. This would hamper disease containment efforts. Also, some diseases (including plant diseases) are airborne and can be spread easily by the wind or air disturbance. The Incident Control Manager has the authority to declare the restricted area as 'restricted airspace'.

Consideration during times of loss

When a large number of animals may need to be destroyed for disease control purposes, and where people's livelihoods are at risk, the people involved may be experiencing considerable distress.

We ask that the media respect the wishes of those people affected, and who may wish to deal with this situation privately.

Who do I contact for information about a biosecurity incident?

The state government authority handling the response to an incident will have a Public Information Manager who is available to assist you with media inquiries. The national Outbreak website (outbreak.gov.au) is available for up-to-date information and will provide links to relevant state/territory information.