

The Year of the Horse

Civil Service Newsletter Editorial Board

■ IT may be the Year of the Rat, but for Hong Kong, it is also the Year of the Horse.

Hong Kong has long had an association with horses, its racetracks at Sha Tin and Happy Valley being part and parcel of what makes this city tick, but co-hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Equestrian Events (the Events) has taken the relationship to a whole new level.

Given Hong Kong's extensive experience in horse racing, its status in equine health and its world-renowned regulatory framework for equine diseases, Hong Kong is certainly well-placed to co-host the Events.

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD), as the veterinary authority for the import and export of animals in Hong Kong, has a major role in ensuring the smooth operation of the Events, making sure the horses are healthy and well cared for.

AFCD is responsible for animal quarantine, disease prevention and overall welfare of the horses. The department is also responsible for establishing requirements for the import of the competing equestrian horses to Hong Kong and for issuing health certificates to facilitate the export of these horses back to their own countries or other destination countries after the Events.

Under the strict arrangements, horses for the Events will be imported from various countries via quarantine stables located around several designated transportation hubs.



A horse inspection team visiting the quarantine stables.

of infectious diseases among competing horses in the Events, all imported equestrian horses will be inspected and quarantined and should show no clinical signs of diseases, and undergo relevant tests and vaccinations before entering Hong Kong.



Entrance to the quarantine stables.

These imported equestrian horses must have health certificates issued by the veterinary authority of the exporting places. AFCD began processing applications for special permits for the importation of these equestrian horses early this year.

AFCD's responsibility also extends to the inspection and quarantine for the import and export of the horse-feed and bedding material of plant origin; monitoring the conditions of the stabling and welfare of horses; and providing administrative support to the overseas veterinarians of individual equestrian teams that apply for approval from the Veterinary Surgeons Board of Hong Kong to practise at the Events.

AFCD has set up a Special Duties Division with a total of eight staff to handle the duties related to the Events and it started to work out the import arrangements in March 2006 for horses participating in the 2008 Equestrian Events.

Given the importance of the Events, the entire department has been involved in the preparations to make sure no stone has been left unturned, particularly in the all-important areas of quarantine and biosecurity. Preventing the occurrence of infectious disease among competing horses and the transmission of disease between Olympic/Paralympic horses and local horse population is of paramount importance.

To ensure the health of the horses, Team or Event Veterinarians will examine each horse and update its clinical record each day. Grooms will take the horses' temperature twice daily and check each horse for ticks while grooming. All health problems will be promptly reported to quarantine officers of AFCD.

The quarantine stables are well designed and air-conditioned. The temperature of the stables is maintained at around 23 degrees Celsius to assist the horses' recovery after exercise. Other cooling facilities such as misting tents will be provided for cooling horses during training and competition. An indoor training arena allows training to continue during rainy days and helps the horses adapt to Hong Kong's hot and humid weather.