

Waste Disposal (Amendment) Bill 2005
Administration's Response to Members' request made at
the 3rd meeting of the Bills Committee held on 30 September 2005

To explain the existing arrangements for disposal of dead animals, animal tissues and body parts generated from veterinary clinics, reasons for excluding such waste which could be potentially infectious and pose serious health risks in the definition of "clinical waste", and provide information on overseas practices in disposal of such waste.

In general, dead pets that have been euthanized because of old age or injury are not regarded as clinical waste. This is because infectious agents generally amplify in the live hosts and decay rapidly within the dead pets. Only dead animals, organs and tissues arising from medical and veterinary research and laboratory practice, and pharmaceutical testing with infectious agents, which could be potentially infectious and pose serious health risks, are controlled as clinical waste.

Overseas practices

2. In most overseas countries, pet carcasses are usually buried. The only precaution is that the burial should be done at places located away from water sources to avoid ground water contamination. There are also some requirements on the depth of the burial pit. In many countries, cemeteries for pet animals are common.

3. While burial of carcasses is the usual practice, there is an increasing trend for pet owners to arrange for cremation of their pet carcasses. There are non-profit organizations dedicated to the advancement of pet post-life management. For example, the International Association of Pet Cemeteries & Crematories has membership in the US, Europe and Asia.

4. In the US, the pet owners have the responsibility to determine the disposal of their pet's remain. Pet carcasses left at veterinary clinics or hospitals can be sent to local landfill, rendering plants, cremator, or pet cemeteries for communal or private handling. The final decision belongs to the pet owners. There are over 600 cemeteries and many pet crematories offering their services to the general public in the US, and many veterinarians arrange

such services for pet owners. Some of these cemeteries operate on a full time basis, specifically dedicated to the burial or cremation of pets. Some human cemeteries have set aside a portion of their ground for pet burials. In Canada, there are some 125 pet cemeteries and crematories which provide similar services to pet owners.

5. In the UK, the Association of Private Pet Cemeteries and Crematoria sets standards and maintains a code of conduct to ensure quality service is provided for the cremation and burial of pets. The Association recommends the burial of unembalmed remains in biodegradable cardboard coffins at a depth of at least 0.9 m with grave plots avoiding watercourses, drains and wells. Up to 30 per cent of pet burials may be in small chipboard coffins. Pet cremation is also a popular option, and there are about 40 pet crematories. Apart from the UK, cemeteries (some dating back hundreds of years) can be found in many other European countries.

6. Pet cremation and cemetery service has also been established in Australia and Zealand for some years. There are some 120 pet cemeteries and crematories in Australia. The New Zealand Pet Crematorium Association Incorporated also published a code of ethics including the need to maintain competent personnel with facilities and equipment adequate to provide a comprehensive pet cremation service.

Local practices

7. Most veterinary clinics in Hong Kong deal with mainly pet animals such as dogs and cats, and pet carcasses would only be encountered when the animals die or are euthanized at their premises. We observe that the number of pets which die in veterinary clinics would be very small since most pet animals would be given good veterinary care at the veterinary clinics. Pet carcasses from veterinary clinics do not require special handling since the risk of disease transmission of such carcasses is low and would be the same as those which die at the owners' premises. The pet carcasses could be safely disposed of as other municipal solid waste (MSW) at landfills which are highly engineered to safeguard against ground water and other contaminations.

8. Section 10 of the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation (subsidiary legislation of Cap. 132) prohibits any person, without

lawful authority or reasonable excuse, to place or cause to be placed, any corpse or carcass in any street or public place, the common parts of any building, any watercourse, stream, channel, ditch or reservoir or the waters of Hong Kong, and Government property except with the consent of a public officer. The penalty under this offence provision is a maximum fine of \$ 25,000 and imprisonment for 6 months.

9. At present, pet owners and veterinary clinic staff can deliver pet carcasses to the attendants of the refuse collection points (RCPs) managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD). The pet carcasses will be handled as MSW and collected by FEHD's contractors for disposal at the landfills. If the pet carcasses are not wrapped up properly before delivery to the RCPs, the attendants at the RCPs will treat them with disinfectant and wrap them up before collection for disposal.

10. The Hong Kong Veterinary Association observes that the animal body parts or the carcasses of pet animals are owned by the pet owners, and should not be regarded as clinical waste from the pet owner and animal welfare point of view. In Hong Kong, most pet owners choose to cremate their pets, either through private cremation service or some veterinary clinics. At present, there are five commercial organizations providing cremation service and the keeping of urns.

11. Regarding notifiable disease defined under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Ordinance (Cap 139), any person, who has in his possession or under his charge any animal or bird affected with or suspected of being infected with disease, is required under the Public Health (Animals and Birds) Regulations (Cap 139A) to notify the fact to a police officer or a health inspector. The case will then be referred to the Director of Agriculture Fisheries and Conservation (DAFC), and the management and disposal of such carcasses will have to be dealt with according to the kind of disease involved.

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
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