

Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department **Quarantine Detector Dog Programme**

Introduction

More than 500,000 people enter Hong Kong via land, sea or air every day. As such there is an ever present threat of the illegal importation of animals and birds.

As a way to strengthen the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department's (AFCD) efforts to prevent the illegal importation of animals and to enhance public health and safety, a Quarantine Detector Dog Programme (QDDP) was established in early 2008. The use of Quarantine Detector Dogs has been shown to be an effective, internationally recognised tool for the detection, and combating smuggling of quarantine items. A trained detector dog can smell controlled items like animals including mammals, birds, reptiles and other animal products even when they are hidden in baggage or under several layers of clothing.

Objective

The aim of the QDDP is to use dogs to 'sniff out' smuggled birds as a method to prevent the introduction of Avian Influenza, detection of other animals in particular dogs in an effort to prevent the introduction of Rabies, as well as to prevent smuggling of endangered species.

By improving detection of smuggled quarantine items, increasing inspection rates, acting as a visible deterrent as well as a means of public education, the dogs serve as a useful tool in preventing the illegal importation of animals and animal products so as to enhance public health and safety, meet the expectation of the public and prevent the introduction of animal diseases.

Dog Selection

Labrador and Beagles were chosen by AFCD as the most suitable breeds for the friendly and outgoing detector dogs working around the public at the Boundary Entry points. In fact, each dog has been carefully selected to join the programme. Each dog can effectively screen more than 300 people per hour and since they are co-operative and gentle with people with an extraordinary sense of smell (said to be at least 100 times more acute than human-being), remaining calm even in the commotion at the Entry points, they have been well received by travelers who see them as welcoming and non-threatening. As well, with quarantine effectiveness largely reliant on an informed and co-operative public, these dogs are of immense public education value.

Training

All AFCD Quarantine Detector Dogs (QDD) and their handlers have undergone intensive training in Australia. The dogs are trained to simply sit when they detect a target odour, and await their food reward from their handlers - the kind of 'passive' response regarded as acceptable around travelers. 'Passive' response training entails placing a target odour (for example from a puppy, kitten, rabbit or chicken) in a suitable container and encouraging the dog to sniff it - the dog is told to sit and is then rewarded with a piece of food.

After the dogs arrived in Hong Kong, the QDD teams progressed to the Entry points at the border or airport passenger terminal for further training under field conditions. Besides current detection operations, AFCD is continually looking for ways to improve training methods and new applications for the QDD teams. AFCD Quarantine Detector Dog unit is based at Ta Kwu Ling Operation Centre where comfortable kennels and training area are provided for the well-being of the dogs.

Public co-operation

You, as a member of general public and / or a traveler, may see AFCD's Quarantine Detector Dogs working at any one of the Entry control points of Hong Kong. Please be patient and keep a steady pace of walking and allow the dogs to work. You and your luggage may be sniffed by the dogs, relax and follow the instructions from the AFCD and Customs officers. If the dog shows a response and sits beside you, it means you may be required to give a detailed declaration and present your belongings to Customs officers for further examination.

Mission

AFCD officers with their detector dogs which are executing their duties by providing screening services at various Boundary Entry points, play an important role in deterring the smuggling of animals, helping to protect Hong Kong from exotic animal diseases and thus safeguarding the public health of Hong Kong citizens.

Quarantine Detector Dogs

