

## The Approved Establishment Program: Guidance for Hunters

There are certain serious animal diseases that could enter the U.S. through imported animal trophies, their hides or their feathers – but with proper processing, the disease agents are destroyed.

### The Role of Approved Establishments

To ensure that trophies are safely imported, APHIS developed the Approved Establishment program. The Approved Establishment program ensures these materials are appropriately handled and treated to prevent the introduction of foreign animal diseases.

### What is an Approved Establishment?

Approved Establishments are taxidermy facilities that handle the specific types of processing needed to kill any potential foreign animal disease viruses. Approved Establishments are inspected and approved annually by USDA. There are also Approved Warehouses that can store these types of trophies and materials prior to processing. When leaving the Approved Warehouse, the trophies must go directly to an Approved Establishment for processing.

The Approved Establishment will use proper processing techniques, which are specific to the animal materials and the diseases of concern, to inactivate or remove any potential disease causing agents. After the processing is complete, they will release the materials back to the hunter or importer.

### Do I Need to Use An Approved Establishment?

If you are bringing back unfinished trophies, bones, antlers in velvet, teeth, horns, hooves, hides, or bird carcasses, you may need an Approved Establishment. More details are in the bar to the right. When in doubt, contact APHIS to check if you need to use an Approved Establishment.

### What do I Need to Do to Bring My Items Back to the U.S.?

The Approved Establishment program requires cooperation between importers (hunters, brokers), the approved establishments, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and USDA.

To import an animal trophy or materials through this program, here are the steps to follow:

1. Know what country the animal is from and check to see if it will required an Approved Establishment before heading overseas. This information is available on the Approved Establishments page. If you have questions, contact the APHIS animal product import team at [APIE@usda.gov](mailto:APIE@usda.gov).

### WHAT NEEDS TO GO TO AN APPROVED ESTABLISHMENT?

Unfinished animal trophies, hides and feathers that come from areas of the world with the following foreign animal diseases must undergo special processing to protect against introducing those diseases into the U.S.:

- highly pathogenic avian influenza (for bird/poultry items)
- virulent Newcastle disease (for bird/poultry items)
- foot-and-mouth disease (for split-hooved animal items)
- African swine fever (for swine items)

The following items may enter without a permit or foreign certificate and do not need to go to an approved establishment:

- finished/mounted trophies
- cleaned and dried bones, antlers, horns and hooves being used as trophies
- flint dried hides from countries without African swine fever
- trophy/display materials from rabbits, rodents, fish, shellfish and non-human primates

These items may still fall under U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or Centers for Disease Control and Prevention import restrictions.

- a. If it requires processing at an Approved Establishment, find one that handles the species you are seeking to import. USDA maintains a database of approved establishments, which is sortable by state and item type:  
<https://vsapps.aphis.usda.gov/vsps/public/AESearch.do?method=unspecified>
  - b. You may also need permits and documents from the U.S. before you leave.
2. Once you are overseas, package your trophy securely in leak-proof containers or crates. If you have trophies from multiple species, be sure to package each species individually. Work with the shipping company (express mail, air cargo, etc.) to correctly identify the shipment and parties involved. The Approved Establishment will be listed as the consignee. Be certain to include any required documents/paperwork.
3. Contact CBP at the port of arrival to make arrangements for your shipment to be inspected upon arrival.
4. Customs officers will review the shipping documents, inspect the shipment and ensure the chosen Approved Establishment is authorized to handle the materials. CBP will authorize movement to the Approved Establishment by issuing a form VS-16-78 to accompany the shipment.
  - a. The shipment should be delivered to the Approved Establishment within 10 days of CBP issuing the authorization form.
  - b. USDA will be notified if the shipment does not arrive at the Approved Establishment.
5. The Approved Establishment receives the shipment. They will complete the required processing, which may be different than what is normally done for US-origin trophies.
6. The trophy/materials are released back to the hunter or importer.

### **What Does the Approved Establishment Program Cost?**

USDA does not charge hunters or importers for the Approved Establishment program. However, the Approved Establishment will charge for their services. There may also be costs involved if the hunter or importer chooses to use a broker or logistics provider to ease the process.

### **Are There Any Other Rules?**

There may also be separate import restrictions from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and/or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Please check with those agencies before importing any trophies or materials.

### **For More Information**

Use our online self-guided tool to understand USDA Veterinary Services import requirements for animal products: [VS Permitting Assistant](#)

For questions about the Approved Establishment Program, contact:

USDA APHIS Animal Import Staff

301-851-3300

[APIE@usda.gov](mailto:APIE@usda.gov)

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animalhealth/approvedestablishments>