

Why the New National Veterinary Accreditation Program Now?

The enhancements taking place in the National Veterinary Accreditation Program (NVAP) have been in the works for many years. During the past decade this country has seen the incursion of several foreign animal diseases (FADs). These have included outbreaks of contagious equine metritis (CEM), outbreaks of equine piroplasmiasis (EP), an epizootic of exotic Newcastle disease (END), epizootics of West Nile virus (WNV), cases of screwworm, cases of monkeypox, and pandemics of the influenza virus including H1N1. In the vast majority of these incursions, the FADs have successfully been eliminated with the veterinary practitioner being the first line of defense against such catastrophic disease events.

Because of these FAD events several major animal health and veterinary medicine organizations called for an enhancement of the existing NVAP. The 2001 Animal Health Safeguarding Review of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) cited a need to “redesign and upgrade the National Veterinary Accreditation Program” and suggested that “the accreditation program be the core for emergency preparedness and the response plan.”

In 2002 the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) published an article entitled “New Directions for the National Veterinary Accreditation Program” which turned out to be an accurate predictor of many of the elements included in the new program. Please see footnotes below.*

In addition to bolstering NVAP’s effectiveness for FAD surveillance, a marked increase in live animal exports has taken place in the last four years. The number of export document requests has roughly increased from 4,000 to 15,000 since 2005. The vast majority of animal exportation starts with the efforts of an accredited veterinarian, and one of NVAP’s goals is to facilitate, clarify and streamline the responsibilities of all parties in these efforts.

Working with multiple State and Federal agencies, major veterinary medical organizations such as the United States Animal Health Association and AVMA, and academic organizations such as the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges, APHIS developed the new elements in the NVAP using the federal rulemaking process.

APHIS published a proposal to amend the regulations in the Federal Register on June 1, 2006 (71 FR 3110931121, Docket No. APHIS20060093). We proposed to establish two accreditation categories (Category I and Category II) in place of the current single category, to add requirements for supplemental training and renewal of accreditation every 3 years, and to provide for accreditation specializations. We solicited comments concerning our proposal for 60 days ending July 31, 2006, and received 23 comments by that date from State departments of agriculture, veterinary medical associations, universities, and individual veterinarians.

In the process of considering the comments, APHIS identified four changes that we believed would improve the June 2006 proposed rule. On February 27, 2007, we published a supplemental proposed rule in order to have public comment on these four changes (72 FR 86348639). We amended the June 2006 proposal by changing the scope of Category I and Category II accreditation; requiring initial accreditation training for all veterinarians seeking accreditation; requiring newly accredited veterinarians to renew their accreditation within 3 years of the initial accreditation training; and reducing the amount of training required for renewal of accreditation.

We solicited comments concerning the supplemental proposal for 60 days ending April 30, 2007, and received 15 comments from a State department of agriculture, a veterinary medical association, and individual veterinarians. The Final Rule was published on December 9, 2009.

To view the June 2006 proposed rule, the February 2007 supplemental proposal, and the comments we received on both rules, go to (<http://www.regulations.gov/fdmspublic/component/main?main=DocketDetail&d=APHIS20060093>).

The national database of accredited veterinarians is outdated in part because of a previous lack of renewal requirements for veterinary accreditation. Because of this, USDA realized that contacting each accredited veterinarian individually to inform him or her of the new program and new renewal requirements was problematic from both a logistics and cost/benefit perspective. Rather than individual mailings, USDA will publish announcements of the new accreditation regulations and veterinarians' resultant obligations in veterinary list serves, veterinary medical association newsletters, State regulatory organization publications, and industry publications. These media all have high visibility in the veterinary medicine community. Accredited veterinarians will be given ample time to elect to participate.

*JAVMA, Volume 220, NO.10, May15, 2002, New Directions for the National Veterinary Accreditation Program

JAVMA News, September 15, 2004, Changes on the horizon for National Veterinary Accreditation Program

AVMA Convention Daily News, July 20, 2005, APHIS previews proposal on two tiered accreditation