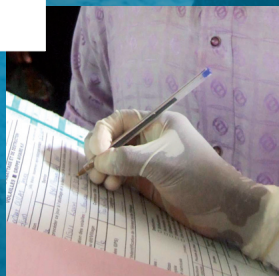


# Deciphering OIE's standard setting process



## What is an OIE international standard?

In 1994 the World Trade Organization recognized the OIE as the international standard setting body for matters dealing with animal health and zoonoses. More recently Members asked the OIE

to also establish guidelines on animal welfare, and on food safety at the level of animal production.

OIE standards, contained in the Terrestrial and Aquatic Animal Health Codes, are measures to be used by veterinary/competent authorities of importing and exporting countries to prevent the transfer of agents pathogenic for animals or humans while avoiding unjustified sanitary trade barriers. Standards also apply for surveillance and control of animal diseases including zoonoses.

Standards that apply to a specific disease are considered vertical standards. Those that apply generically to all countries in all situations such as the duty to report diseases, or the quality of the national veterinary services are horizontal standards. Other standards covering diagnostic methods and quality of vaccines are also adopted and published by the OIE.



## Why are OIE international standards being developed?

OIE standards are developed in order to provide science based recommendations for facilitating safe trade in animals and animal products while avoiding unjustified trade barriers.

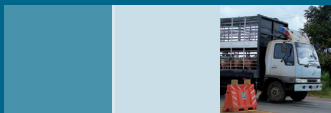


## How are they developed and by whom?

As the World Organisation for Animal Health, OIE is the only international organization with the scientific expertise, and the recognized authority to develop international animal health standards under international law.

They are developed by international experts from all regions of the world brought together by the OIE at the request of OIE Delegates, individual scientists or other international organisations and OIE bodies. The process of adopting or updating a standard is a very flexible one and allows a continuous improvement to the standards whenever there is new scientific information to justify that.

Permanent working groups (as for example on wildlife diseases, animal welfare, and animal production food safety) and ad hoc groups are formed to review and further develop standards relating to specific animal diseases, disease surveillance, biosecurity, microbial resistance, and other relevant issues. The recommendations drafted by these groups must be reviewed by specialist commissions elected by National Delegates before being submitted for comment by Members and eventually adopted by all Members at the yearly General Assembly of the organization. Then and only then are they incorporated into the Codes acquiring the official status of international standards.



## What are the trade implications?

In setting these standards, the OIE allows for international trade in animals and animal products to be made fair and safe. The standards apply equally to all countries and territories, help avoid non tariff trade barriers, and help developing countries to have equal access to the world market when adhering to these standards.

Knowing the disease status of a country allows a trading partner to specify reasonable precautionary measures.

When a country cannot, or has not, reached a disease free status throughout its territory, or in the case of an outbreak in one area (zone) of a country while the rest of the country remains disease free, it can designate zones or compartments free of certain disease, thereby reducing the restrictions needed to be applied. To properly designate zones or compartments, there must be disease surveillance, control of movement of animals and biosecurity measures in place. By implementing the

measures necessary for zoning or compartmentalisation, a country can still trade in animal products regardless of its disease status outside the zone or compartment.

In setting international, science based standards the OIE eliminates arbitrary discriminatory measures that prevent small farmers in developing countries from having access to markets.



## Which commodities?

Commodities are defined as animals or animal products intended for human consumption or other uses. This includes fish and seafood, meat, and meat products, eggs, honey, milk and other dairy products. It also includes semen, embryos and ova for animal breeding. Animal by-products

like hides, feathers, or bone meal, and animal feed, are also commodities under these standards. The OIE defines commodities and provides specific science-based recommendations for safe trade in commodities and for cases where commodities can be rendered safe, even if a disease is present in a territory. This approach reduces the unnecessary burden on exporting countries.



## The importance of animal disease notification

In order to assess the risk of importing from a specific country the first question is which animal diseases are present there. All OIE Members are obligated to report every occurrence of the diseases listed in the Terrestrial and Aquatic Animal Health Codes. Immediate notification is the rule for certain diseases when they appear for the first time, or reappear after having been successfully eliminated. Other diseases are reported at six month intervals.

This information is maintained by the OIE in a database called WAHID, the world animal health information database available on line. The disease status of potential trading partners is always known. WAHID also allows a ready comparison of the disease status of two countries, and the history of a country in reporting disease is readily visible.





## Effective Veterinary Services: key players

The standards on quality of veterinary services are fundamental to a harmonized approach to the certifying infrastructures worldwide. The credibility of a veterinary certificate for trade purposes is only as good as the credibility and integrity of the veterinary service that issues it. The veterinary services are also responsible for disease surveillance and testing, and for regular reporting of notifiable diseases to the OIE, all in compliance with OIE standards of quality and evaluation of Veterinary Services, democratically adopted by OIE members. They must have adequate resources, technical capacity and interaction with stakeholders. In order to be able to evaluate the competencies of national veterinary services, the OIE has developed an evaluation tool, called the PVS. Using this tool and qualified OIE experts, the OIE is actively involved in helping countries to evaluate and improve their veterinary services.



## Ensuring regional and global market access

By complying with the OIE standards as described above, countries can set the conditions for bilateral trade on science based recommendations, which are no more restrictive than necessary to protect animal and public health. Countries can trade in animal and animal products without endangering the health of their animal or human populations. Thus, arbitrary and discriminatory trade restrictions are avoided, or at least minimized.