

USDA INSPECTIONS OF COMMISSARIES AND A GUIDE TO BEST PRACTICES

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Abstract

Commissaries and food preparation areas are an important element of the husbandry and care of captive non-domestic animals, and are thus inspected regularly by APHIS Animal Care. Animal Care inspectors will look for several key conditions in a commissary or animal food preparation area. While there is no official check list, inspectors will routinely examine the following:

Cleanliness:

- food preparation areas, countertops and sinks
- food preparation utensils, including saws, can openers or other mechanical devices
- food storage containers, refrigerators and freezers
- floor and walls of the food preparation area(s)

Handling

- fresh fruit and vegetables
- fresh fish or meat
- potential cross contamination between meat and produce
- frozen meat or fish products (thawing protocols)
- live prey or insects intended for food
- provision for refrigeration of perishables from the time they leave the commissary until they are fed out

Storage

- fresh food items
 - Dates of fresh food products, when available, will be noted
- frozen food items
 - Dates of frozen food packages will be noted
 - Plans for rotation of frozen food products should be in place
 - Evaluation for freezer burn
- dried food products
 - Dates will be checked and the storage rotation plan discussed
 - Broken packages must be placed in containers or be resealed
 - Evidence of rodents or insect pests will be noted
 - Examination for food quality and evidence of mold
- vitamin and mineral supplements

- Storage conditions; e.g. temperature, exposure to direct sunlight
- Expiration dates
- hay and bulk grain
 - Examined for quality, species appropriateness, and evidence of mold or toxic plants
 - Ventilation of hay barn
 - Bird and rodent control in hay barn or around the bulk grain areas
 - Browse sources should be guaranteed free of herbicides and insecticides

Cleaning agents

- Appropriateness of storage
 - Ensure they are stored away from food preparation areas
- Usage
 - Proper dilution of cleaning agents
 - Ensure cleaning agents are appropriate for the job; rotating disinfectants may help to prevent resistant stains of bacteria
 - Ensure sufficient contact time and thoroughness of rinse

Pest Control

- Protocols and frequency of pest control measures
- Evidence of pests in any food handling or food storage areas

A successful programmatic approach to commissary management and regulatory compliance includes the following elements:

- Food vendor quality control
 - Timeliness of deliveries
 - Quality of deliveries
- Food sampling protocols
 - How is incoming food examined for quality?
 - What are the SOP's for rejecting a shipment?
- Contingency plans
 - Contingency plan for ensuring adequate food for the animals if a new shipment contains unacceptable food
 - Contingency plan for maintaining frozen/refrigerated food quality in case of a power outage
 - Contingency plan for temporary unavailability of specialized diets
- Posted SOP's for fish and meat handling
- Presence of posted diets for individual animals or groups of animals
- Diet approval

- Who approves the diets and diet modifications?
- Who approves food items for enrichment, and where do these food items come from, the commissary or elsewhere?
- Who ensures that the keeper does not feed too many enrichment food items and substantially replace the nutritionally complete diet which was approved?

Appendix

Regulations specific to food areas in the Animal Welfare Regulations are as follows, and are from 9 CFR Subchapter A:

For most non-domestic mammals:

Subpart F -- Specifications for the Humane Handling, Care, Treatment, and Transportation of Warmblooded Animals Other Than Dogs, Cats, Rabbits, Hamsters, Guinea Pigs, Nonhuman Primates, and Marine Mammals

§3.125 Facilities, general.

(b) Water and power. Reliable and adequate electric power, if required to comply with other provisions of this subpart, and adequate potable water shall be available on the premises.

(c) Storage. Supplies of food and bedding shall be stored in facilities which adequately protect such supplies against deterioration, molding, or contamination by vermin. Refrigeration shall be provided for supplies of perishable food.

(d) Waste disposal. Provision shall be made for the removal and disposal of animal and food wastes, bedding, dead animals, trash and debris. Disposal facilities shall be so provided and operated as to minimize vermin infestation, odors, and disease hazards. The disposal facilities and any disposal of animal and food wastes, bedding, dead animals, trash, and debris shall comply with applicable Federal, State, and local laws and regulations relating to pollution control or the protection of the environment.

§3.129 Feeding.

(Also refer to [Policy 25](#), Proper Diet for Large Felids)

(a) The food shall be wholesome, palatable, and free from contamination and of sufficient quantity and nutritive value to maintain all animals in good health. The diet shall be prepared with consideration for the age, species, condition, size, and type of the animal. Animals shall be fed at least once a day except as dictated by hibernation, veterinary treatment, normal fasts, or other professionally accepted practices.

(b) Food, and food receptacles, if used, shall be sufficient in quantity and located so as to be accessible to all animals in the enclosure and shall be placed so as to minimize contamination. Food receptacles shall be kept clean and sanitary at all times. If self-feeders are used, adequate measures shall be taken to prevent molding, contamination, and deterioration or caking of food.

For Maine Mammals:

§3.105 Feeding.

(a) The food for marine mammals must be wholesome, palatable, and free from contamination and must be of sufficient quantity and nutritive value to maintain marine mammals in a state of good health. The diet must be prepared with consideration for factors such as age, species, condition, and size of the marine mammal being fed. Marine mammals must be offered food at least once a day, except as directed by the attending veterinarian.

(b) Food receptacles, if used, must be located so as to be accessible to all marine mammals in the same primary enclosure and must be placed so as to minimize contamination of the food they contain. Such food receptacles must be cleaned and sanitized after each use.

(c) Food, when given to each marine mammal individually, must be given by an employee or attendant responsible to management who has the necessary knowledge to assure that each marine mammal receives an adequate quantity of food to maintain it in good health. Such employee or attendant is required to have the ability to recognize deviations from a normal state of good health in each marine mammal so that the food intake can be adjusted accordingly. Inappetence exceeding 24 hours must be reported immediately to the attending veterinarian. Public feeding may be permitted only in the presence and under the supervision of a sufficient number of knowledgeable, uniformed employees or attendants. Such employees or attendants must assure that the marine mammals are receiving the proper amount and type of food. Only food supplied by the facility where the marine mammals are kept may be fed to the marine mammals by the public. Marine mammal feeding records noting the estimated individual daily consumption must be maintained at the facility for a period of 1 year and must be made available for APHIS inspection. For marine mammals that are individually fed and not subject to public feeding, the feeding records should reflect an accurate account of food intake; for animals fed, in part, by the public, and for large, group-fed colonies of marine mammals where individual rations are not practical or feasible to maintain, the daily food consumption should be estimated as precisely as possible.

(d) Food preparation and handling must be conducted so as to assure the wholesomeness and nutritive value of the food. Frozen fish or other frozen food must be stored in freezers that are maintained at a maximum temperature of -18 °C (0 °F). The length of time food

is stored and the method of storage, the thawing of frozen food, and the maintenance of thawed food must be conducted in a manner that will minimize contamination and that will assure that the food retains nutritive value and wholesome quality until the time of feeding. When food is thawed in standing or running water, cold water must be used. All foods must be fed to the marine mammals within 24 hours following the removal of such foods from the freezers for thawing, or if the food has been thawed under refrigeration, it must be fed to the marine mammals within 24 hours of thawing.

References

- 1) Code of Federal Regulations 9, Subchapter A, 2005
- 2) Animal Care Policy 29, Animal Care Resource Guide 1998
(<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ac/policy/policy25.pdf>)
- 3) Crissey, S.D., Slifka, K.A., Shumway, P., and S.B. Spencer. 2001 Handling frozen/thawed meat and prey items fed to captive exotic animals: A manual of standard operating procedures. USDA Agricultural Research Service, National Agricultural Library, APHIS. (<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ac/handlemeat.pdf>)
- 4) Crissey, S.D. 1998. Handling Fish Fed to Fish-Eating Animals: A Manual of Standard Operating Procedures. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, National Agricultural Library.
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