

NEWS

Vets urge post-nuke plan for animals

THE Veterinary Association says vets are concerned at the lack of planning for animals in a nuclear winter.

Association president Roger Marchant said yesterday that the association had for some time been investigating planning for animal requirements, both for farm animals and urban pets, in a disaster, including a nuclear disaster.

It had become obvious that none of the authorities responsible had seriously considered this to date — a serious oversight in a country with more than 80 million animals.

He said in any disaster involving serious food shortages, a big problem would arise with urban pets.

Contingency plans should exist to determine the point at which available food was restricted for human consumption, and on how to cope with the problem of pets after that point.

It would be inhumane to let pets starve, and dangerous to leave large groups of hungry animals loose to fend for themselves. Dogs would tend to form marauding packs, he said.

Another concern to veterinarians, so far overlooked by planning authorities, was the need to assign priority for scarce drugs in for either animal or human use.

He said that if people were to be fed in a prolonged disaster, such as a nuclear winter, the health of food-producing animals would need to be ensured up to a specified point, and this would require a significant allocation of drugs used for both animals and humans. The number of food-producing animals needed to feed people in a nuclear winter had not been determined.

New Zealand's animals consumed far more drugs than people did, and many of these drugs were common to both groups, Dr Marchant said.

The association called for plans to ensure the rational use of drugs held by vets in national or regional disasters. — NZPA