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GUIDELINES FOR STRAYS

Looser lassos, bigger cages

DOG-CATCHERS, be careful.

Make sure a dog doesn't choke when it's lassoed.

Lassos should be loose enough to put two fingers under the rope used.

This is one of the new guidelines from AVA on how to capture, handle and transport strays.

Mr K Madhavan, head of AVA's centre for animal welfare and control, said AVA and NEA decided to look into the issue because they had a report from SPCA that pest-control companies may not be handling properly the stray animals they catch.

The guidelines are based closely on SPCA's draft, which was vetted by its consultant veterinarian Grace Heng last month.

NEA mailed the guidelines to the pest-control companies around the middle of last month. The rules include correct use of proper equipment such as lassos and nets.

The AVA also says:

- Animal traps should be sheltered from sun and rain, and monitored daily.

The guidelines also say:

- Provide suitably large cages that do not restrict animals from standing or lying down on vehicles.
- Don't keep different species of animals next to each other.
- Provide captured animals with food, water and proper accommodation.
- Give sick or injured animals veterinary attention as soon as possible.
- Keep proper records of the date, time and place of capture of animals.

Mr Madhavan said AVA will continue to monitor the pest-control companies that provide animal control services to ensure they have proper equipment and facilities for catching animals.

'It would not be possible for AVA to be present during the catching operations of the pest-control companies. AVA would not be in a position to witness all acts of cruelty and would need to rely on the public to report any act of cruelty to animals,' he added.

If a pest-control company is found to violate the guidelines, will its licence be revoked?

CANNOT REVOKE LICENCE

Mr Madhavan said: 'NEA licenses pest-control companies for their normal activities such as fumigation, white ant and rat control.

'They do not license the activity of catching dogs and cats. NEA has indicated that they would thus not be able to revoke the licence if they violate the guidelines.

'However, under the Animal and Birds Act, it is an offence to treat animals cruelly and AVA can take action against the offender. The

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maximum penalty is a fine of \$10,000 or jail up to 12 months or both.'

Mr Thomas Fernandez, managing director of PestBusters for 14 years, welcomed the guidelines.

'It's a good thing to have for those who are unscrupulous,' he said. Those who abuse animals should be punished.

'I'm very upset to hear that such a thing happened,' he added.

'We even treat rats humanely by putting them to sleep with gas. As for animals like snakes, we release them into nature reserves.

'Pest-control companies shouldn't be in the business if they can't handle animals responsibly,' he said.

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