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Officers and personnel from the Kansas Highway Patrol, Seward County Sheriff's office, Liberal Police Department, Seward County Emergency Management and a veterinarian work a section of U.S. Highway 54 west of Liberal in a drill simulating traffic stops to inspect animals suspected of carrying hoof and mouth disease. L&T photo/Victoria Calderon

By VICTORIA CALDERON

- Leader & Times

Motorists driving on U.S. Highway 54 near the Oklahoma border caught a glimpse of vehicles from the Kansas Highway Patrol, Seward County Sheriff's office and the Liberal Police Department gathering in an empty lot off Road G Thursday morning.

The local law enforcement agencies, as well as various people from the county, the beef industry, Seward County Emergency Management Services, and even a veterinarian, were

gathered to run a movement restrictions for diseased cattle drill.

Movement restrictions for diseased cattle are checks done when outbreaks of disease in cattle have occurred to ensure that the disease does not spread further. The sheriff's department gets a list from the state of what animals are affected by the disease.

Drills for these cases are ordered by the Kansas Animal Health Commissioner to be done across the state.

"We are required to do drills like this so if it actually does happen, we'll know what to do," Undersheriff Gene Ward explained.

This particular drill was directed to check for hoof and mouth disease in any animal with hooves, such as cattle. Any semi-trucks carrying animals would be directed from the highway to be checked by officers.

To conduct the drill successfully, officers blocked off an area of the road with traffic cones. In a real situation, any semi-truck driver would be pulled from the highway to this checkpoint area to speak with officers. For the sake of the drill, some truck drivers were asked to participate. They allowed officers to practice what would be said and done when a semi-truck carrying potentially diseased animals passes by. However, the truck drivers were not driving actual semi-trucks for the drill.

The truck drivers "carrying animals" were asked where they were from, their destination and what animals they had in their cargo by the officers. If the animals were from a certain origin, then they were directed to the empty lot, where they were to be checked for hoof and mouth disease.

"For this particular drill, all the diseased animals are from Rome, Ga.," Ward said. "So if any livestock or anything that has a hoof on it is coming from that area, then we pull them over to this area, and we have veterinarians standing by, to where they would check the animals."

The officers also had to practice checking the driver's permits and filling out the necessary paperwork. To move past a checkpoint in a real situation, the drivers receive a form from the officers approving the health of their animals. The form could be used to show at other checkpoints farther along, so as to save the driver from having to go through the process later on down the road.

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