When it comes to combating disease, sometimes rumours are useful

In accordance with the OIE's mandate to ensure transparency, a specialised team in the World Animal Health Information and Analysis Department (WAHIAD) collects official and non-official information on the occurrence of OIE-listed and emergent events throughout the world.

It is very important to maintain transparency in animal disease information at the country level to avoid the international spread of animal pathogens. In addition, transparency is one of the main values promoted by the OIE to improve international collaboration and solidarity. In 2002, to make its World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS) more effective and obtain as complete a knowledge of the world animal health situation as possible, the OIE began to actively search for non-official information and rumours relating to animal health and public health. Recently, an active search of unofficial information played a key role in the early detection and publication of animal disease information during the Rift Valley fever regional event in Eastern Africa, and the recent spread of African swine fever in Asia.

Thus on a daily basis, a team of eight staff members within WAHIAD dedicate part of their work to information screening and confirmation. The information collected by the active search team is carefully evaluated in the context of the country animal health situation and, if needed, verified with the Member Country or Territory for the purposes of official confirmation and potential publication. The workflow followed by this team during search, verification and confirmation is represented in the figure below.
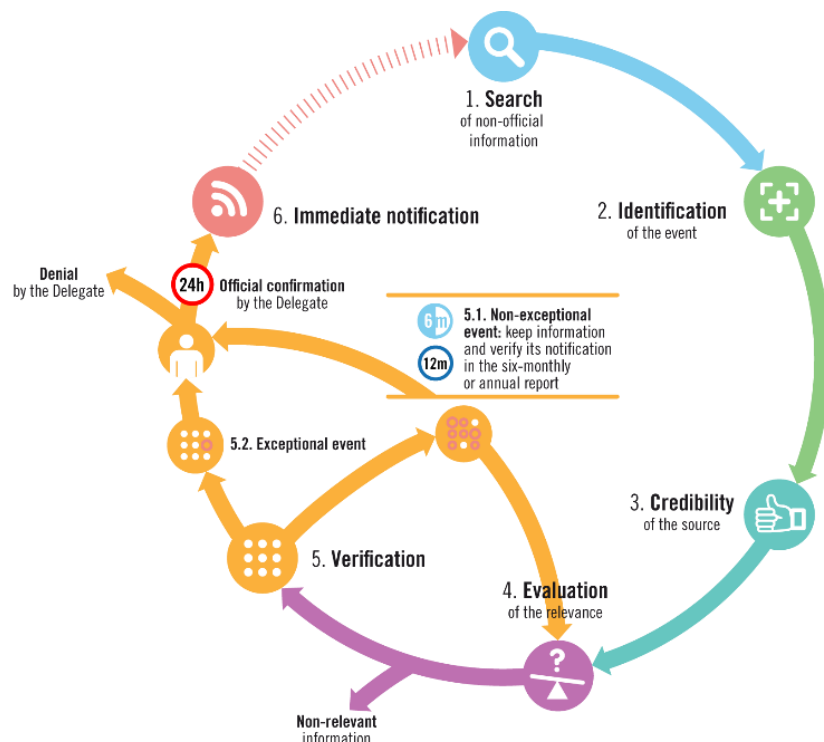

Figure 1. Methodology of the tracking activities

The team uses the following systems for the automatic detection and collection of rumours: the IBIS information system, kindly provided by the Australian Government, and the EIOS (Epidemic Intelligence from Open Source) platform, a project led by WHO. Moreover, it shares active rumours within the Tripartite framework through the GLEWS (Global Early Warning and Response System) platform.

2018 in numbers…

In 2018, the team recorded a total of **1,174 rumours**. Thanks to these, **44 immediate notifications and follow-up reports** were submitted and published to inform the international community on the occurrence and evolution of epidemiological events.

These included OIE-listed diseases for terrestrial and aquatic animals, aquatic and terrestrial emerging diseases, zoonoses and events occurring in wildlife.

The diseases most frequently found were highly pathogenic avian influenza, rabies and foot and mouth disease, which were distributed globally, as rumours had been gathered from all OIE regions. In total, **804** of these records were also used to improve the quality of the six-monthly and annual reports submitted to the OIE.

In a changing and dynamic world, rapid detection, early confirmation and immediate publication of animal disease information can make the difference in "protecting animals and preserving our future". To this aim, performing active searches of unofficial information plays a small but important role.

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