Butcher Safety Meeting Kit

IT’S ALL ABOUT SAFETY

Butchers prepare a variety of meat products, but safety is the number one ingredient behind the meat counter. Safety for butchers is about training, inspections, and following safe work procedures.

Food industry workers in places like butchers are constantly slicing, dicing, and cutting food. Whether it’s a sharp knife or a food slicing machine, vegetables and meats must be cut up into various sizes for countless uses. Whenever anyone is handling sharp blades, there is a possibility of a cut injury.

REDUCE RISKS FOR BUTCHERS

Cuts: There are several cutting hazards in occupations like butchers that regularly use sharp tools and machinery. Severe cuts are a common workplace injury that can be traced back to a lack of training and supervision, lack of attention while using sharp tools and machinery, or missteps such as using damaged guards (or a lack of guarding altogether).

Help prevent cuts by making sure employees wear appropriate hand and foot protection at all times. OSHA standards for hand protection include steel mesh gloves to guard hands against blade cuts. The only exception to this rule should be in the instance of using meat-processing equipment like band saws, meat cubers or grinders, as wearing gloves in these situations could actually lead to a catastrophic injury. The hazard of having hands pulled into the machinery if the glove becomes entangled is much more serious than the hazard for which the glove is being worn.

Sturdy, close-toed shoes should be worn to protect feet should a knife be dropped accidentally. Knives should be placed in a designated area when not in use, keeping the blades with the

cutting edge facing safely away.

Slicers and Grinders: Meat grinders and slicers can cause severe injuries, amputations, and even death if they are not used properly. Always inspect the slicer and grinders prior to use. Discard any damaged, broken, or worn-out equipment. Make sure all guards and safety devices are in place. Use lockout/tag out procedures for cleaning, servicing, adjusting, repairs, changing parts, maintenance and to clear jams and ensure proper PPE is worn, such as hand protection.

When using a slicer or grinder, be aware of where your hands are. Ensure the slicer or grinder is at the correct setting before you turn it on. Use the appropriate size food pushers; never use your hands to process food through grinders and slicers. Under no circumstance should a pusher be used in lieu of guarding. Keep your fingers and hands away from the moving parts and blades at all times. Never reach across the blade or grinder. Tie hair back, remove dangling jewelry, and wear form-fitting clothing to prevent getting pulled into the equipment.

Always operate equipment according to the manufacturer's instructions. Turn off and unplug the slicers and/or grinders when not in use or left unattended, and don't forget to switch the thickness dial of the meat slicer to zero.

Repetitive Motions: Long-term repetitive hand motions can lead to chronic problems, such as carpal tunnel syndrome – a condition that's caused by pressure on the median nerve at the wrist. It causes pain, numbness and tingling in the hand and arm and can worsen over time.

Spread out repetitive tasks to various workers throughout the day. In order to reduce work periods in which excessive repetitive wrist bending is necessary, butchers should be allowed to take frequent breaks from these types of activities and encouraged to stretch their muscles regularly.

Strains and Muscle Injuries: Butchers stand for long periods of time. This puts a strain on muscles and joints in the leg. It can

also cause an individual to suffer from back pain, especially if the fatigue from standing results in poor posture. Non-adjustable work surfaces can lead to poor working postures.

Lifting heavy items can result in muscle strains in the shoulders, back, neck and legs. Back injuries can also occur from forceful movements such as cutting.

These types of injuries can be mitigated by positioning grinders, slicers, scales and other commonly used items so that work is performed at about elbow height. Adding ergonomic workstations can help workers avoid some discomfort.

Slips, Falls and Other Hazards: Slips and falls are another source of injury. Train employees to immediately clean up spills or place a wet floor sign over the area if the spill cannot be immediately cleaned. Degreasers should be utilized for cleanup in wet/greasy areas. Shoes with quality, slip-resistant soles should be worn at all times, and slip-resistant mats with beveled edges should be placed in wet areas.

A Hazardous Communication program (HAZCOM) should be established to give employees knowledge of the proper use of chemicals, the personal protective equipment needed and other vital information.

MORE BUTCHER SAFETY TIPS/PRACTICES

- Employees should be taught methods for proper lifting and carrying awkward, heavy items. Objects should be lifted by bending at the knees (not the back), and properly carrying the item by keeping the heaviest part closest to the body. Any object that weighs over 50 pounds should require two people to lift and carry it. To minimize the handling of extremely heavy items, use material handling devices like hand trucks and dollies.
- Wear plastic gloves that can fit securely over your bare hand or over protective gloves to reduce contact with raw meat. Wear coveralls to protect your skin and clothing. Decontaminate surfaces throughout the day.
- General working conditions for butchers are usually cold in

order to keep meat products fresh. Make sure to wear layers. Take breaks to warm and rest your hands, which can fatigue faster with repetitive tasks in a cold environment. Use protective gloves and heat pads when handling hot foods and pans.

- Make sure you have plenty of lighting to see your workspace and job tasks clearly. Water used for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces can cause slip hazards, so wear shoes with a non-slip sole. Inspect work area frequently to ensure your tools, equipment, and facilities are in safe working condition. Get training in safe work techniques and proper operation of your tools and equipment.

FINAL WORD

You cannot replace fingers, thumbs or hands. Loss can have life long devasting impact in engaging the amenities of life not to mention a reduction in earning capacity. One slip of a knife, slicer or grinder can prove to be disastrous.