Live Animal Handling for Butchering Meeting Kit

What’s At Stake

Safe handling of animals for butchering (processing) starts with the facility layout. It begins with the management of the animals as they move through the process and ends with a properly trained worker in butchering techniques.

ANIMAL HANDLING, PROCESSING AND BEHAVIOUR

Pens, yards, and gates used to hold the animals should be sturdy and well maintained.

As animals enter the processing area, the goal should be to keep them calm while moving.

Know the animal and its typical behaviors before you work near them or one-on-one.

In general, approach animals slowly and from the front or side so you don’t spook them to kick or rear up.

Use caution when stunning, sticking, and eviscerating animals.

Equipment with moving parts in butchering facilities poses a hazard if you get your body or clothing caught in it.

NATURE OF LIVE ANIMAL HANDLING

Although slaughterhouses and “meat”-processing facilities are highly mechanized and manual labor is required at several stages of production. Workers are usually trained for one specific part of the process. For example, some workers kill and bleed the animals while others make a series of cuts to separate fat, muscle, and bone.

Employees are very aware of the dangerous nature of their work.

When you combine sharp tools and automated machinery in a high-paced, crowded environment, injuries are inevitable.

What’s the Danger

HEALTH AND SAFETY HAZARDS

T he single largeSAFETY st factor contributing to worker injuries is the speed at which the animals are killed and processed. In an industry where profit margins are slim and volume is everything, workers are endlessly pressured to kill more animals in less time. Rather than regulate line speeds for the interest of worker safety, line speed is limited only by federal sanitation laws. Most facilities operate nearly 24 hours a day 7 days a week – killing and processing hundreds or thousands of animals each hour.

LONG HOURS/REPETITIVE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS

The combination of long hours and repetitive motion directly leads to increased risk of injury. The workers suffer chronic pains in their hands, wrists, arms, shoulders and back. Repetitive stress injuries are unavoidable under the frantic pace that most facilities choose to operate.

Working an 8-hour shift in this type of environment is physically and mentally exhausting. The situation gets far more dangerous when workers are required to work mandatory overtime. Most workers are in a continuous state of pain due to the long hours and repetitive nature of their work.

Psychologists are becoming increasingly interested in exploring the psychological effects of working in a slaughterhouse. Workers who are responsible for killing animals routinely observe animals being cut and dismembered while still conscious, as well as being skinned and boiled alive.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

BEST LIVE ANIMAL HANDLING PRACTICES

Serious safety and health include exposure to high noise levels, dangerous equipment, slippery floors, musculoskeletal disorders, and hazardous chemicals.

- Keep animals calm. Contact with stressed animals can lead to kicks, bites, and scratches. Wear steel-toed shoes with slip-resistant soles to protect your feet. Sturdy work gloves protect your hands.
- Stunning of animals can be accomplished by an electric stun gun, electric wires, a pneumatic gun or hammer. Get training on the stunning methods used at your facility. Avoid contact with the stunning equipment and do not enter the animal wells. Animals should be fully stunned before you start to process them.
- Moving conveyors, sharp carcass hooks, and automatic cutting implements can cause catching and crush injuries. Properly guard and avoid contact with moving equipment. Use lockout/tagout procedures whenever you repair, maintain, or clear jams from automated equipment.
- Water keeps work areas clean and sanitary for the workers and the products, but wet walking surfaces can lead to slips, trips, and falls.
- Wear shoes with slip-resistant soles. Use floor drains and squeegees to remove standing water. Make sure the area is well-lit so you can see where you are working and walking.
- Sharp cutting tools are used to “stick,” eviscerate, and skin animals, to clean bones, and create cuts of meat. Some cutting is accomplished by hand and some by automated equipment. Maintain all cutting tools properly and keep them sharp to prevent accidental cuts and punctures.
- Contact with live animals and carcasses can transmit pathogens such as avian flu and E. coli. Maintain a sanitary work environment and decontaminate surfaces. Wear gloves and wash your hands often during the work day. Consider splash goggles and face shields, depending on your work assignment. Use wet methods to clean up in order to cut down on dust, dirt, and feces inhalation. Working in an area with good ventilation and respiratory protection, if necessary, can protect your lungs.

- Temperature extremes range from hot to cold in animal processing. Scalding water for treating carcasses can burn you. Cold storage and processing lines can lead to hypothermia and frostbite. Wear layers of clothing that you can adjust. Wear gloves and a cap to prevent frostbite. Aprons, gauntlets, and gloves can protect you from burns.
- Cuts and punctures can be caused by knives, saws, and grinders/mincers, as well as bones and sharp surfaces. Make sure blades are sharp. Inspect them frequently and replace or repair items as needed. Wear mesh gloves, gauntlets, and body aprons to protect yourself from cuts.
- Zoonotic diseases can be transmitted from animals to humans. Get training in zoonotic diseases and prevention steps. Avoid stirring up dust. Use water and low-dust cleanup methods. Use good hygiene by wearing protective clothing and equipment, decontaminating surfaces and equipment frequently, and washing your hands often. Keep work areas well ventilated. Wear respiratory protection such as a dust mask or respirator to prevent inhaling dusts and other contaminants.

FINAL WORD

For owners and workers in a meat slaughter and processing facility, there are requirements ranging from health and sanitation to waste disposal to specific facility or building requirements. Because the requirements can vary so much from place to place, it is really important to obtain the correct information to manage risk appropriately.