Meat Packers Meeting Kit

What’s At Stake

The meat packing industry is a fast-paced work environment with hazards such as cutting implements, moving machinery, physical and repetitive labor, and slippery surfaces.

What’s the Danger

RISKS FACING MEAT PACKING WORKERS

1. **Cuts and knives.** A dull knife is a dangerous knife! Most accidents are usually due to the knife not being sharp. A dull knife will make you apply more pressure to the item you are cutting. This can result in injury as the knife may roll off the item cutting you. A sharp knife will cut be faster, safer and easier.

Safe knife handling solutions. Personal protective equipment (PPE) to prevent cuts and punctures starts with sturdy work shoes to protect your feet when a knife or other sharp object may fall to the ground. Aprons can protect your upper legs and torso from accidental cuts and slices while you work. Gauntlets can protect your arms. Cut-resistant butcher’s gloves, typically made of mesh or Kevlar®, protect your hands. Latex or nitrile gloves can be worn over and under the cut-resistant gloves to help them stay sanitary, last longer, and improve your grip while you work.

1. **REPETITIVE MOTIONS**

A high level of force is often needed which can lead to strain on the hands, shoulders, neck and back. Hand-intensive tasks, in particular, put significant stress on areas like the wrist and tendons. 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.

Solutions Reducing Repetitive Motions. The long-term effects can be reduced by spreading out repetitive tasks to various workers throughout the day. In order to reduce work periods in which excessive repetitive wrist bending is necessary, employees should be allowed to take frequent breaks from these types of activities and encouraged to stretch their muscles regularly.

1. **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.

Protective Solutions in Slicer and grinder operations

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.

1. **Strains and Muscle Injuries.** Butchers and grocery store meat packing employees 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.

Strain And Muscle Injury Solutions

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 and adding anti-fatigue mats to

work areas can help relieve some of the strain from standing for long periods of time.

1. **Slips and Falls.** 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.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

BEST GENERAL SAFE WORK PRACTICES

Slips, trips, and falls are common in meatpacking plants because of the loss of bodily fluids from the carcasses and the amount of water used to process meats and to clean and sanitize plant machinery.

- Wear water-resistant boots with a slip-resistant sole and a reinforced toe to protect your feet.
- Keep up on housekeeping to remove fluids and other debris continuously.
- Use proper signage for wet floor areas, whether they are temporarily or continuously wet.
- Use non-slip floor coatings, rubber grates, and mats to provide safe walking surfaces through wet areas.

The meatpacking plant can have a range of extreme temperatures from cold processing areas and refrigeration units to scalding water for cooking and sanitation.

- Wear layers to protect you from temperature extremes.
- The noise of moving machinery, cutting blades, and water spray may require hearing protection in some work areas.
- Make sure there is good lighting to see your job tasks and any moving equipment or meat parts.
- Good ventilation can prevent exposure to animal bacterium

that can cause disease.

All employees need safety training, depending on their job tasks.

- Get training in overall plant safety.
- Take specific training needed to do your job tasks, work with your assigned tools and equipment, and use chemicals properly.
- Turnover rates in the meatpacking industry can be quite high.
- New employees are more likely to be injured on the job and need extra training and supervision while they learn their job tasks and hazards.
- Pack your plant with safety and quality, proper procedures, protective equipment, and training help you get the job done right.

FINAL WORD

Cuts, lacerations, and punctures are common injuries in the meat packing and butchering industry. Knives, slicers, grinders, and sharp bones are all potential hazards that can be minimized with the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), safe work practices, inspections, and training.