Animal Processing Safety Meeting Kit



ANIMAL PROCESSING – INTRODUCTION

Animal processing facilities combine the hazards of working with live animals along with moving machinery and cutting tools. If you work in an animal processing plant, get training on animal handling and the equipment and processes you will be using.

There are many serious safety and health hazards in the meat packing industry. These hazards include exposure to high noise levels, dangerous equipment, slippery floors, musculoskeletal disorders, and hazardous chemicals (including ammonia that is used as a refrigerant).

TYPES OF INJURIES THAT OCCUR IN ANIMAL PROCESSING PLANTS

Injuries due to heavy lifting. In many meat processing plants, workers must lift, load, and stack heavy boxes of meat onto pallets. Lifting and twisting the body with arms extended increases the compressive forces on the lower back, often leading to deep muscle strains and herniated disks over time.

Falls. The slippery floors in meat packing plants put workers at risk for slip and fall injuries ranging from minor bruises to dislocated shoulders or knees, hip fractures, spinal cord damage, or serious traumatic brain injury. In poultry plants, for example, walkways are often adjacent to fast-moving conveyor belts where chickens are processed using large amounts of water that continually splash on nearby surfaces.

Injuries due to repetitive motion. Carpal Tunnel Syndrome in poultry processing is more than seven times the national average. In pork processing, workers must perform repetitive tasks with tools, such as split saws and knives. In addition to Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, workers may develop painful conditions, including tendinitis, epicondylitis, and trigger finger.

Injuries due to defective machinery. Many aspects of meat processing are highly mechanized. When defective equipment lacks proper safety guards, workers attempting to perform maintenance or fix jammed machines may suffer serious hand and arm injuries, including amputated fingers, broken bones, and fractures.

Injuries due to extended standing. Many employees in meat processing plants must stand shoulder-to-shoulder on assembly lines for long periods without a break. Extended standing can result in painful medical conditions, including plantar fasciitis, venous pooling of blood in the legs, and varicose veins.

Injuries due to line speeds. Many workers at meat processing plants perform tasks on high-speed assembly lines. Studies have documented that the risk of injury increases when workers are required to perform their jobs faster.

Diseases from biological hazards. Workers in all types of meat processing plants may be exposed to blood and feces of animals that may harbor harmful bacteria. Poultry workers in particular are at risk for contracting additional illnesses, including avian influenza, salmonella, psittacosis, and Campylobacter.

Medical conditions caused by chemical exposure. Ammonia is often used as a refrigerant in meat processing plants. Breathing ammonia vapors can cause lung damage. Peracetic acid, an irritating chemical, is commonly sprayed on poultry and meat during processing to kill bacteria. Workers often develop eye, nose, and throat irritation when exposed to peracetic acid, resulting in coughing, bleeding, and other symptoms.

Hearing impairment. Heavy machinery in meat and poultry processing plants produces constant noise, putting workers at risk for permanent hearing loss, tinnitus, and related conditions.

COMMON HAZARD CONTROL MEASURES

- implement an effective ergonomics program.
- implement an effective hearing conservation program.
- implement design and maintenance of electrical systems and an effective lockout/tagout program to prevent injury from accidental start-up of machinery during maintenance activities.
- provide required personal protective equipment (PPE).
- guard dangerous equipment.
- follow OSHA’s process safety management standard to protect workers from accidental leaks of ammonia.
- incorporate engineering controls, such as improving sanitation and ventilation measures, to protect workers from chemical and biological hazards.
- maintain walking/working surfaces to prevent slips, trips and falls.
- implement OSHA’s Hazard Communication Standard requirements and ensuring workers are not exposed to unsafe levels of hazardous chemicals.

BEST ANIMAL PROCESSING SAFETY PRACTICES

- 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.
- 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.
- Properly guard and avoid contact with moving equipment. Use lockout/tagout procedures whenever you repair, maintain, or clear jams from automated equipment.

- Wear shoes with slip-resistant soles. Use floor drains and squeegees to remove standing water. Use properly insulated and grounded equipment with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI).
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

FINAL WORD

Workers in animal processing facilities are subjected to a range of safety and health hazards from exposure to high noise levels, dangerous equipment, slippery floors, musculoskeletal disorders and hazardous chemicals. In depth training is required on animal handling including the equipment and processes used.