

Health and Safety Risks to Abattoir Workers: HSE Response to ACDP Concerns Regarding TSE Agents

◆SIM 1/2002/52

Target Audience:

FOD Inspectors responsible for the meat industry

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SUMMARY

This SIM, which revises and replaces SIM 5/2001/30, has been prepared to inform field inspectors of the concerns of ACDP regarding health and safety standards in abattoirs and how HSE should respond to notifications of possible bad practice. Updated information is given at Appendix 2.

BACKGROUND

1 The Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens (ACDP) expressed serious concerns at the apparent poor standards of abattoirs operating the Over-Thirty-Month Scheme (OTMS) for culling cattle. The committee was shown a video of the operation at one abattoir and was of the opinion that the practices they saw were likely to exist elsewhere and exposed workers unnecessarily to materials which might contain the BSE agent.

HSC/HSE RESPONSE

2 These concerns were communicated to HSC, Food Standards Agency (FSA) and MAFF (now Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)). The HSC/HSE response has been:

- (1) to ensure HSE inspectors carrying out revisits to the 19 OTMS abattoirs enforce appropriate standards to protect workers from transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) (the Sector is monitoring these visits (see para 9));
- (2) to discuss, at regular Sector meetings with the industry via the Meat Trades Joint Working Party, the ACDP concerns and to encourage the industry to apply appropriate standards and adequate supervision (eg for wearing protective clothing); and
- (3) to ensure HSE's closer working with other Government departments (OGDs) which have direct links with abattoirs - the Intervention Board (IB) and the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS).

CLOSER WORKING WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

3 Sector representatives together with the HSE HD delegate to the ACDP committee and representatives of the IB, DEFRA, MHS and the industry met to discuss what additional actions could be carried out. It was agreed in principle that IB technical inspectors, who visit all cull abattoirs on a weekly basis, should include some basic health and safety considerations in their inspections. To aid them a checklist (see Appendix 1) was produced covering a limited number of matters of evident concern regarding prevention of exposure to the BSE agent.

4 In addition IB inspectors were provided with a copy of the British Meat Manufacturers Association/HSE Guidance Note 55 (subject file 543) on personal protective equipment (PPE) in the meat industry. This Guidance Note gives specific advice on hand/arm protection and the type of measures required to protect the trunk, foot and head.

5 For its part the IB agreed to liaise with HSE when it came across instances of repeated and flagrant bad practice causing evident concern. In cases where the IB had occasion to warn employers more than 3 times within a 6-month period it will contact HSE centrally via the Sector about the matter. This will enable central records to be kept of the information received and the action taken.

ACTION

6 The Sector will assess information received from the IB and where appropriate ensure that it is relayed promptly to the operational office. Action taken by the operations group based on this information should be reported back to the Sector so that feedback can be provided to the IB and to show that we are addressing the concerns of ACDP.

7 Because information from the IB is 'intelligence' from another agency, the information is not to be treated in the normal way for a matter of concern, ie through the complaints procedure; instead, it should be considered within the context of the overall knowledge of performance of the duty holder involved when assessing appropriate interventions.

8 Where reinspections of the 18 OTMS abattoirs (see para 2(1)) have not been carried out in 2001/2, visits are still required. These particular visits were initiated by memos of the 4 April and 6 June 2001 from the Sector to relevant heads of operations.

9 The most recent information on these revisits (based on FOCUS contact reports) is given at Appendix 2. From the records, 6 premises have not been visited in 2001, although of those inspected since April this year, only 5 visits were carried out while cull work was being done. If there are any updates to the information in Appendix 2, the Sector would very much appreciate receiving them.

CANCELLATION OF INSTRUCTIONS

10 SIM 5/2001/30 - **cancel** and **destroy**.

Date first issued: 31 January 2002

APPENDIX 1
(para 3)

H&S CHECKLIST FOR INTERVENTION BOARD INSPECTORS

**Safeguarding against possible exposure to the BSE agent in
OTMS Cull Abattoirs**

Due to the concerns that abattoir workers may be exposed to the BSE agent during the cull of animals in the Over Thirty Month and associated schemes it has been agreed that technical inspectors with the Intervention Board should have information on what HSE considers the main risk areas to be.

The main risk is splashing of broken skin or mucous membranes with materials containing the agent. Action must be taken to avoid cuts and to ensure the wearing of adequate Personal Protective Equipment. (PPE)

This checklist is intended to highlight the main precautionary measures required to prevent and control possible exposure to the BSE agent during the slaughtering and carcass handling processes in abattoirs. Failure to comply with the advice given in this checklist is likely to be in breach of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations.

Abattoirs must **NOT**

- 1 *Pith
- 2 *Centre split carcasses
- 3 Use high pressure water jets ¹
- 4 Allow employees to eat, drink or smoke in the workplace

Abattoirs **MUST**

- 5 *Use bungs to plug the captive bolt hole after stunning
- 6 Use PPE , appropriate to the task (see BMMA Guidance Note 55 attached) which will include,

impervious overalls and boots

impervious gloves which cover hands and arms

chain mail or equivalent cut protection

full face visors during back splitting and stunning (a fixed guard may be substituted for a visor during stunning but such a guard must be shown to be effective as there is evidence that neural material from stunning may be ejected up to 2 metres)

- 7 Use protective clothing which is disposable, for preference, or washable and stored separately after cleaning

- 8 Ensure that skips used for disposal of carcasses are in good condition and do not leak

* These measures are required by the contract between the IB and the cull abattoirs.

¹ Water pressure should be as low as practicable consistent with hygiene needs but not more than 500psi.

APPENDIX 2
(para 9)

CULL ABATTOIR LIST



¹ Exemption 14 – Information given in confidence