

# The Animal Welfare officer in the European Union

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The new animal welfare EU regulation applicable to slaughterhouses (Regulation 1099/2009) requires that slaughterhouse operators appoint a qualified person, the **animal welfare officer**, to ensure that standard operating procedures are implemented in order that animal welfare rules are properly understood and applied.

However, the appointment of an animal welfare officer is not compulsory for small slaughterhouses (see page 25).





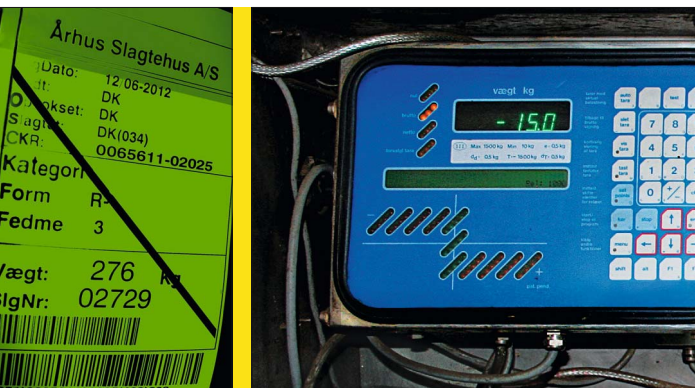
While the overall legal responsibility for complying with EU rules falls on the slaughterhouse operator, the animal welfare officer is the technical responsible for translating this obligation into practice.

The animal welfare officer is hence a key person for ensuring that all operations in slaughterhouses meet European Union rules for animal welfare.

Their responsibilities are clearly set out in EU law<sup>1</sup> and to carry them out, animal welfare officers must be specifically qualified and formally appointed.

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<sup>1</sup> particularly in article 17 of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 of 24 September 2009 on the of animals at the killing (Official Journal of the European Union L 303/1 18.11.2009)



This handbook provides a step-by-step guide to the tasks of the animal welfare officer in the European Union.

## 2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE PERSON AND TASKS

The competent authorities are responsible for official controls on the implementation of animal welfare rules by business operators in slaughterhouses.

Overall, the animal welfare officer works, on behalf of the slaughterhouse operator, as the **contact point** for the competent authorities, **provides guidance** to the personnel

working on a slaughter line and **checks** that the guidance is put into practice.

While his or her role is mainly operational, the **animal welfare officer is also the best placed to advise** the slaughterhouse operator in relation to investments for renovation and new equipment. Some EU rules on the layout, construction and equipment are not immediately applicable for existing slaughterhouses but will apply from December 2019, and therefore the necessary preparations should already be made so that the slaughterhouse is compliant by that date.

This requires expertise. And it requires the development of **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** for the slaughterhouse for which he or she is responsible. The animal welfare officer must also ensure that these SOPs are effectively complied with, and must maintain an accurate record of actions taken.

The animal welfare officer must have sufficient **authority and technical competence**, including detailed knowledge of the relevant EU rules, to provide guidance to slaughter line-personnel (see page 6).

*Some SOPs are explicitly required by the legislation. These relate to*

- *key stunning parameters (see page 9);*
- *checking of the effect of stunning (see page 16);*
- *maintaining and using restraining and stunning equipment (see page 20).*

Other SOPs are necessary for ensuring compliance (see page 21).

The animal welfare officer must ensure that the SOPs are known and understood by the relevant personnel (see page 23).

And the animal welfare officer must keep records of actions he or she takes, in discharging his or her responsibilities for ensuring that SOPs are in place and are followed (see page 24).

### **3. THE QUALITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS OF THE ANIMAL WELFARE OFFICER**

The animal welfare officer should have sufficient authority and technical competence to provide relevant guidance to slaughter line personnel.

The animal welfare officer must be in possession of a certificate of competence for all the operations taking place in the slaughterhouse for which he or she is responsible.



*Certificates of competence are issued by the authorities of the Member States, and based on passing of independent examinations on subjects relevant for the categories of animals concerned and corresponding to the operations involved. The operations may include:*

- the handling and care of animals before they are restrained;*
- the restraint of animals for the purpose of stunning or killing;*
- the stunning of animals; the assessment of effective stunning;*
- the shackling or hoisting of live animals;*
- the bleeding of live animals;*
- slaughtering;*
- back-up stunning and/or killing methods.*

The animal welfare officer must be in a position to require that all personnel perform their tasks in accordance with EU animal welfare rules in general and with the specific SOPs established for each slaughterhouse.

*The officer must ensure that operations are carried out by persons with the appropriate level of competence to do so without causing the animals any avoidable pain, distress or suffering, and that where appropriate, training that is recognised and approved by the national designated authorities is being followed.*

The animal welfare officer must also be able to require that any remedial actions necessary are carried out to ensure compliance with EU standards and specific SOPs.

Hence, the animal welfare officer must be duly mandated by his/her slaughterhouse operator to exercise the authority necessary for his or her duties. Preferably, he should be directly responsible to the slaughterhouse operator.

It is the slaughterhouse operator that appoints the animal welfare officer for each slaughterhouse, to assist in ensuring compliance with relevant EU animal welfare rules.

The animal welfare officer reports any matters on animal welfare to his or her slaughterhouse operator, especially if they need a managerial decision.





## 4. THE KEY STUNNING PARAMETERS

The animal welfare officer must be familiar with all relevant aspects of stunning parameters<sup>2</sup> for the species and operations in the slaughterhouse for which he or she is responsible.

The legislation establishes requirements for stunning but some parameters have to be defined by the slaughterhouse operator (called „key parameters“). The role of the animal welfare officer is hence to define these key parameters and make sure that they are implemented.

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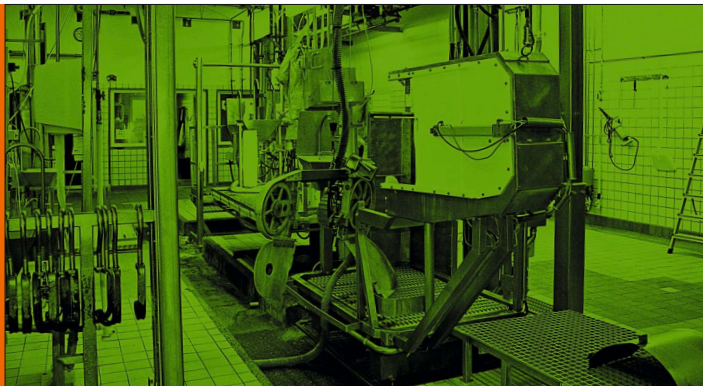
<sup>2</sup> See annex 1 of the regulation of the complete list of stunning methods and related specifications

For **the penetrative captive bolt**, the following must be defined and monitored: the position and direction of the shot, the appropriate velocity, exit length and diameter of the bolt (according to animal size and species), and maximum stun to stick/kill interval(s).

For electrical stunning techniques key parameters must be set up.

For **head-only electrical stunning**, the following must be defined and monitored: the minimum current (A or mA) according to animal category, minimum voltage (V), maximum frequency (Hz), minimum time of exposure, maximum stun-to-stick/kill interval(s), frequency of calibration of the equipment, optimisation of the current flow, prevention of electrical shocks before stunning, and position and contact surface area of the electrodes.





For **head-to-body electrical stunning**, the following must be defined and monitored: the minimum current (A or mA) according to species, minimum voltage (V), maximum frequency (Hz), minimum time of exposure, frequency of calibration of the equipment, optimisation of the current flow, prevention of electrical shocks before stunning, and position and contact surface area of the electrodes, and maximum stun-to-stick interval(s), in case of simple stunning(s).

For **electrical waterbath stunning**, the following must be defined and monitored: the minimum current (A or mA), minimum voltage (V), maximum frequency (Hz) according to species, minimum time of exposure, frequency of calibration of the equipment, prevention of electrical shocks before stunning, minimising pain at shackling, optimisation of current flow, maximum shackle duration before the waterbath, minimum time of exposure for each animal, immersion of the birds up to the base of the wings, maximum stun-to-stick/kill interval(s) for frequency over 50 Hz(s).



For **gas methods** key parameters must be set up.

For **carbon dioxide at high concentration**, the following must be defined and monitored: the level of carbon dioxide concentration, duration of exposure, maximum stun-to-stick interval(s) in case of simple stunning, quality of the gas, and temperature of the gas.



For **carbon dioxide in two phases**, the following must be defined and monitored: the carbon dioxide concentration, duration of exposure, quality of the gas, and temperature of the gas.

For **carbon dioxide associated with inert gases**, the following must be defined and monitored: the carbon dioxide concentration, duration of exposure, maximum stun-to-stick/kill interval(s) in case of simple stunning, quality of the gas, temperature of the gas, and oxygen concentration.

For **inert gases**, the following must be defined and monitored: the oxygen concentration, duration of exposure, quality of the gas, maximum stun-to-stick/kill interval(s) in case of simple stunning, and temperature of the gas.

## SUMMARY CHECKLIST FOR STUNNING

### mechanical stunning

✓ position and direction of shot		
✓ appropriate velocity		
✓ maximum stun to stick/kill interval(s)		
<b>+ Plus</b>		
✓ penetrative captive bolt devices	exit length and diameter of the bolt	

### electrical stunning

✓ minimum current (A or mA)		
✓ minimum voltage (V)		
✓ maximum frequency (Hz)		
✓ minimum time of exposure		
✓ maximum stun-to-stick/kill interval(s)		
✓ frequency of calibration of the equipment		
✓ optimisation of the current flow		
✓ prevention of electrical shocks before stunning		

electrical stunning		
<b>+ Plus</b>		
✓ head-only and head-to-body electrical stunning	position and contact surface area of the electrodes	
✓ electrical waterbaths	missing pain at shackling	
	maximum shackle duration before the waterbath	
	immersion of birds up to wing	
gas stunning		
✓ gas concentration		
✓ duration of exposure		
✓ temperature of the gas		
<b>+ Plus</b>		
✓ carbon dioxide at high concentration	quality of the gas	
	maximum stun-to-stick interval(s)	
✓ carbon dioxide in two phases	quality of the gas	
✓ carbon dioxide associated with inert gases	quality of the gas	
	maximum stun-to-stick interval(s)	
	oxygen concentration	
✓ inert gases	quality of the gas	
	maximum stun-to-stick/kill interval(s)	
	oxygen concentration	

## 5. CHECKING OF STUNNING

Animals must not present any signs of consciousness or sensibility between the end of the stunning process and death.

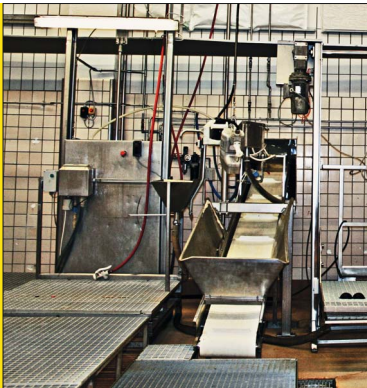


Applying a stunning procedure requires some technical conditions but, due to their complexity, they might not always deliver good results. It is hence **essential to regularly verify that the stunning effect is delivered in practice** and for the duration necessary for the animal to die without regaining consciousness.



The animal welfare officer is responsible for ensuring that this requirement is being met. This means first designing a **monitoring procedure**, making regular checks, and laying down in an SOP what measures should be taken if checks reveal that it is not being met.

The checks have to be carried out on a **representative sample of animals** at a frequency that takes account of the outcome of previous checks and any factors which may affect the efficiency of the stunning process – such as changes regarding the types or the size of animals slaughtered or personnel working patterns.





When checks reveal that an animal is not properly stunned, the appropriate measures specified in the relevant SOP must be applied immediately.

Where **animals are slaughtered without prior stunning** (when duly allowed by national rules), **systematic checks are needed** to ensure that the animals do not present any signs of consciousness or sensibility before being released from restraint and do not present any sign of life before undergoing dressing or scalding.

Monitoring must ensure results with a high level of confidence. SOPs governing the procedure must require:

- *the name of the persons responsible for the monitoring procedure;*
- *indicators designed to detect signs of unconsciousness and consciousness or sensibility in the animals;*
- *indicators designed to detect the absence of signs of life in animals slaughtered without stunning;*
- *criteria for determining whether the results shown by the indicators are satisfactory;*
- *the circumstances and/or the time when the monitoring must take place;*
- *the number of animals in each sample to be checked during the monitoring;*
- *appropriate procedures to ensure that in the event failure to meet the specified criteria, the stunning or killing operations are reviewed in order to identify the causes of any shortcomings and necessary changes to be made to those operations.*

A specific monitoring procedure must be put in place for each slaughter line.



## 6. MAINTAINING AND USING EQUIPMENT

The animal welfare officer must check that equipment for restraining and stunning is properly used, in a way that ensures optimal conditions for the welfare of animals.

**Manufacturers of restraining and stunning equipment are required to provide instructions for the use and the maintenance** of such equipment, depending on the species, categories, quantities and/or weights of animals for which the equipment is designed.

Hence, the animal welfare officer must make sure that these instructions are known and properly implemented by the personnel concerned in the slaughterhouse.

The animal welfare officer can also complete and/or adapt manufacturers' instructions so that these types of equipment deliver good results in the context of their slaughterhouse.

## 7. ENSURING GOOD PRACTICE

The EU legislation provides for operational rules for handling and restraining animals in slaughterhouses.

The animal welfare officer must ensure that **all operational requirements are properly addressed** by the SOPs of the slaughterhouse.

In particular, the animal welfare officer must ensure that the welfare conditions of **each consignment of animals are systematically assessed**, so as to establish priorities in treatment.

*The animal welfare officer must:*

- *determine which animals have specific welfare needs (notably un-weaned animals, lactating dairy animals, females that have given birth during the journey, or animals delivered in containers), and*
- *decide the corresponding measures to be taken (immediate slaughter, particularly in the case of animals which are unable to walk, which must be killed where they lie; or, where immediate slaughter is not possible, arrangements for milking, suckling, or provision of water).*

The animal welfare officer is also responsible for regularly inspecting the condition and state of health of the animals in a lairage.

In addition, the animal welfare officer must establish SOPs covering operational procedures in the slaughterhouse that can have an impact on animal welfare.

*These must cover the arrival, moving and handling of animals including:*

- \* rapid unloading and subsequent slaughter without undue delay, but without any undue rushing of animals from the holding pens;*
- \* arrangements for lairage accommodation, feeding, and bedding, and clear indications on each pen of arrival time;*
- \* preparation and readiness for immediate use of isolation pens for animals that require specific care;*
- \* quality and handling of containers in which animals are transported;*
- \* clear indications of handling behaviour that is prohibited (listing actions which would cause pain or suffering, or present danger of injury) and that is permitted (clearly indicating related limits and conditions);*
- \* stunning, slaughter and handling methodology and practice.*



## 8. MAKING SURE THE RULES ARE KNOWN AND UNDERSTOOD

The animal welfare officer must ensure that SOPs are known and understood by the relevant personnel depending on their tasks in the slaughterhouse.

This requires the development of a **communication and education strategy** for use inside the slaughterhouse.

Examples of materials that may be useful in this task are posters, lists of procedures, and images or photos to illustrate what should and should not be done.

The animal welfare officer must either create or obtain suitable material of this nature, and must also make sure that the right language is used.



In addition, the EU legislation requires that personnel handling animals hold a certificate of competence regarding their tasks. While the certificate can only be delivered by an official body, the **animal welfare officer can contribute to the education of personnel** by providing them with explanations and background information necessary for obtaining the certificate.

The animal welfare officer is also in charge of **checking that the personnel have the appropriate knowledge and skills** for their tasks and, where necessary intervening to take measures in order to maintain these competencies.



## 9. RECORD KEEPING

The animal welfare officer must keep records of actions he or she takes in discharging his or her responsibilities for ensuring that SOPs are in place and are followed.

These records will cover actions he or she has taken to improve animal welfare in the slaughterhouse.



The record must be kept for at least one year. It must be provided to the competent authority upon request.

## 10. IS AN ANIMAL WELFARE OFFICER COMPULSORY FOR ALL SLAUGHTERHOUSES?

The **animal welfare officer is not required** for slaughterhouses slaughtering less than 1,000 livestock units of mammals or 150,000 birds or rabbits per year. However, obligations related to their tasks as previously described remain and have to be implemented by the slaughterhouse operator.

A 'livestock unit' is a standard measurement unit allowing comparison among different categories of livestock:

- *Adult bovine animals<sup>3</sup> and equidae are equivalent to 1 livestock unit;*
- *Other bovine animals are equivalent to 0.5 livestock unit;*
- *Pigs with a live weight of over 100 kg are equivalent to 0.2 livestock unit;*
- *Other pigs are equivalent to 0.15 livestock unit;*
- *Sheep and goats are equivalent to 0.1 livestock unit;*
- *Lambs, kids and piglets of less than 15 kg live weight are equivalent to 0.05 livestock unit.*

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<sup>3</sup> as defined by Council Regulation (EC) No 1234/2007 of October 2007 establishing a common organisation of agricultural markets and on specific provisions for certain agricultural products (Single CMO Regulation)

## 11. A FINAL CHECKLIST – ABOUT THE JOB, AND ABOUT YOU

A checklist about the job	
✓ Have you created Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the slaughterhouse for which you are responsible, covering operational procedures that can have an impact on animal welfare?	
✓ Have you ensured that the SOPs are known and understood by the relevant personnel?	
✓ Have you created a communication strategy on rules and SOPs inside the slaughterhouse?	
✓ Does your communication strategy allow easy understanding by slaughterhouse personnel?	
✓ Have you established specific SOPs for checking that animals do not present any signs of consciousness or sensibility between the end of the stunning process and death?	
✓ Do your SOPs specify what measures must be taken when checks reveal that an animal is not properly stunned?	
✓ Can you ensure that these SOPs are effectively complied with?	
✓ Can you require that any remedial actions necessary are carried out to ensure compliance with EU standards and specific SOPs.	
✓ Have you checked that equipment for restraining and stunning is properly used?	
✓ Have you ensured that the equipment is correctly maintained and cleaned?	
✓ Have you established a method for monitoring efficiency to ensure any necessary calibration of stunning equipment?	
✓ Have you put in place a specific monitoring procedure for each slaughter line?	

### A checklist about the job

✓ Do you ensure systematic assessment of the welfare conditions of each consignment of animals as it arrives, so as to establish priorities in treatment?	
✓ Do you regularly inspect the condition and state of health of the animals in a lairage?	
✓ Have you maintained an accurate record of actions taken?	
✓ Are you ensuring your records are kept for at least a year, and are available to the competent authority upon request?	

### A checklist about you

✓ Do you have a certificate of competence for all the operations taking place in the slaughterhouse for which you are responsible?	
✓ Do you have detailed knowledge of the relevant EU rules?	
✓ Have you been given the authority by the business operator to require that all personnel perform their tasks in accordance with EU animal welfare standards in general and with the specific SOPs you have established?	
✓ Do you know all relevant aspects of stunning parameters for the livestock and operations in the slaughterhouse for which you are responsible?	
✓ Are you familiar with the instructions for use of equipment utilised in the slaughterhouse that you are responsible for?	

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