

RISK MANGEMENT GUIDELINES

Safety in the Use of Knives

Introduction

The following guidance is largely aimed at the use of knives within the butchery/meat/fish/poultry processing trades, however, the general guidance provided is as relevant to all knife users. In general, knife accidents involve cutting or stabbing the non-knife hand and forearm, more serious accidents also occur as a result of stabbing injuries to the body. When fatalities occur it is generally as a result of de-boning operations, during such a process the meat is held down on the surface with one hand, whilst the knife is held in the other hand and pulled through the meat towards the body. Should the knife slip, or skid off the bone, there is a significant risk that the operative will be stabbed.

Whilst the following information is designed to give guidance in the use of knives, there may be other legislation, especially that concerning food hygiene which may also govern the selection of materials for the construction and the storage and cleanliness of both knives and protective equipment.

What the Law Says

The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HSW Act) requires employers to ensure the health and safety of all employees and anyone who may be affected by their work.

Employees must not endanger themselves or others and must use any safety equipment provided. Manufacturers and suppliers have a duty to ensure that their products are safe. Adequate information about appropriate use must also be provided.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 build on the HSW Act and include duties on employers to assess risks and where necessary take action to safeguard health and safety.

All employers have to assess the risks to employees and others who may be affected by their work. This helps to find out what needs to be done to satisfy the law. Royal & SunAlliance have produced further guidance on the risk assessment process and this may assist in more fully evaluating the level of the risk in relation to other workplace hazards (See Risk Management Guideline No.16 – Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations for further details).

Good Working Practices

1. Select the correct tool for the job – knives are generally manufactured to perform a particular task. Using the wrong knife can significantly increase the risk.
2. Ensure that all knives are kept sharp – a blunt knife will not cut as well and therefore more force will have to be used to penetrate the item being cut. This increases the risk of the knife slipping or skidding and also increases the likely level of injury should a stabbing incident occur. Know your own knife and how sharp it is, when using a steel to sharpen a blade ensure that it is fitted with a hand guard.
3. Always replace the knife in its scabbard when not in use. Never walk around with a knife in your hand unless the blade is covered.
4. Where there is a risk of fingers slipping onto the blade during a cutting operation (especially de-boning) ensure that the handle is constructed of a material which offers a good level of slip resistance and that it is designed so as to reduce the potential for slipping.
5. Very narrow knives should be avoided – knives will narrow through sharpening and, whether they have been worn in this way, or were originally narrow, they are more likely to break during use and may more easily penetrate protective aprons, gauntlets, gloves etc.
6. Ensure that all operatives are suitably trained, including
 - a) The correct use of knives and other hand tools
 - b) How to correctly sharpen and bone
 - c) The dangers associated with the misuse of knives and other hand tools
 - d) The correct use of protective equipment and clothing.
7. Always pick up a knife by the handle and never try to catch a falling knife.
8. Never lay a knife down on a work surface, where they could be covered by other objects.

Protective Clothing

Injuries can be prevented by wearing the correct protective clothing. Garments widely available include:

Aprons

1. Aprons are particularly important in de-boning operations and any other task that requires the knife to be pulled point first towards the body.
2. Most aprons are currently made from overlapping metal disks, or interlocking metal rings and there is a British Standard (BS EN 412) covering the specification for aprons for use with hand knives.
3. The apron should cover the chest, abdomen and legs, from mid breastbone to mid thigh and should be fully adjustable at both shoulder and waist to ensure that it sits neatly against the body. Its weight should be borne by the wearer's shoulders and not the neck. The bib should not sag when the wearer bends forward.
4. The aprons must be kept in good condition, any loose or missing rings or disks should be repaired/replaced immediately and all adjustments and fastenings should be in full working order.

Gloves

1. Gloves are recommended for use on the non-knife hand whenever there is a significant risk of the knife stabbing or being drawn across the non-knife hand and are especially recommended for operatives who are inexperienced or being trained.
2. Gloves come in a variety of sizes and designs and care should be taken in ensuring that the glove supplied is suitable to the needs of the user.
3. Some gloves also include wrist and forearm protection. If this is not the case forearm protectors made of clear plastic and either attached to or independent of the gloves should also be obtained.

Good Working Practices

1. Always use the protective clothing provided, especially during de-boning or similar high risk operations.
2. Make sure that all protective clothing is the correct size for you and where necessary, suitably adjusted to fit closely and comfortably.
3. Report any defects in the equipment and ensure that any necessary maintenance is attended to.
4. Keep your protective clothing clean.

Further Information

Further advice is available in the following publications.

Safety in meat Preparation: Guidance for butchers HSG45 HSE Books 1994 ISBN 0 7176 0781 X.

Safety Guidance Notes No. 10 Safe use of Knives and No.55 Personal Protective Equipment at Work in the Meat Industry – both published by the British Meat Manufacturers Association, 19 Cornwall Terrace, London NW1 4QP

Check out the HSE website:
www.open.gov.uk/hse/hsehome.htm

HSE priced and free publications are available from:

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