

Meat retail industry

In order to understand the safety requirements for the meat retail industry and your obligations for safety you must consider and understand relevant legislation and codes of practice.

What law applies

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What law applies

In order to understand the workplace health and safety requirements for meat retail industry, and your obligations under the law you must consider and understand relevant legislation and codes of practice.

General health and safety obligations

To understand your obligations and safety requirements you must be familiar with the:

Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 which imposes obligations on people at workplaces to ensure workplace health and safety. The *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* also helps you to meet your workplace health and safety obligations through:

- The *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008* which describes what must be done to prevent or control certain hazards which cause injury, illness or death
- codes of practice, which are designed to give practical advice about ways to manage exposure to common risks. In particular, the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007* should be read in conjunction with information on PPE.

Every Queensland employer must have **workers' compensation** insurance. Most employers insure with WorkCover Queensland, while a small number of large organisations have their own insurance. This insurance coverage ensures that employees injured at work receive financial support.

What you must do

It is a requirement of the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* that risks must be assessed and control measures then implemented and reviewed to prevent or minimise exposure to the risks.

If the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008* describes how to prevent or minimise a risk at your workplace you **must** do what the regulation says. If there is a code of practice that describes how to prevent or minimise a risk at your workplace you **must** do what the code says or adopt and follow another way that gives the same level of protection against the risk.

If there is no regulation or code of practice about a risk at your workplace you **must** choose an appropriate way to manage exposure to the risk. People must, where there is no regulation or code of practice about a risk, take reasonable precautions and exercise proper diligence against the risk.

See the *Risk Management Code of Practice 2007* for further information.

Industry overview

The meat retail industry includes places such as butcher shops and meat departments in supermarkets.

Common activities at these workplaces include:

- preparing individual cuts from large portions of meat;
- manufacturing value-added products (hamburger patties, sausages, lard, tallow, pet foods, meals);
- packaging and weighing;
- customer service;
- cleaning;
- loading transport vehicles.

The most common injuries experienced by workers in the meat retail industry are sprains and strains (43%) and open wounds (25%).

Other injuries and illnesses include:

- nerve damage (including carpal tunnel syndrome) – 11%
- contusions and crushing – 6%
- fractures – 6%
- muscles and tendons – 4%
- amputation – 1%
- other – 4%

Risk management

The *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* proposes a **five-step** process for managing risk in your workplace.

1. Look for the hazards
2. Decide who might be harmed and how
3. Decide on control measures
4. Put control measures in place
5. Review the controls

Control measures must be implemented in the following order:

1. Remove or eliminate the harm
2. Replace with something less harmful
3. Separate people from the harm
4. Improve work processes
5. Administrative arrangements, for example, limiting time spent in a hazardous area and training
6. Personal protective equipment

Risk management is all about managing exposure to risks associated with hazards at workplaces.

For more information on addressing particular hazards associated with the meat retail industry refer to the typical hazards section.

Typical hazards

Typical hazards that can affect people working in the meat retail industry include hazards associated with:

Manual tasks, including using knives

Lifting, cutting, stacking, moving objects

Plant, equipment and machinery

Bandsaws, mincers, mixers and other machinery

Lighting and floors

Adequate lighting, clean floors, dangers of spills

Cold rooms and other confined spaces

Working in cold rooms, limiting time, rotating workers, protective clothing

Scalds, burns and diseases

Hot water, chemical burns, infections

Other hazards

Hazardous substances, noise, drugs and alcohol

Manual tasks

Manual tasks are those activities that require you to grasp, strike, throw, lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move or restrain something. Examples of manual task hazards in the meat retail industry include:

- pushing and lifting heavy cuts of meat;
- using knives and saws;
- lifting, stacking and unloading heavy cartons; and
- repeated forceful gripping and turning actions, such as trimming around small bones.

Ways to control hazards

Here are some ways to reduce or remove the risks from manual tasks in the meat retail industry.

- Use different shackle lengths for different carcass sizes.
- Use hand-held hooks for gripping or moving meat.
- Ensure cartons of meat and other objects are not too heavy and have grips or handles attached where possible.
- Where there are no handles or handholds (for example, cuts of meat) use slings or other aids, such as rollers, hooks and mechanical assisting devices.
- Use overhead railings from the shop to the cold room to avoid carrying heavy carcasses.
- Fold the sides of cartons down before packing to avoid lifting meat over the high sides.
- Make sure table surfaces can be sloped towards the worker to reduce neck-bending. Metal pegs at the top edge of the table can hold the meat in place.
- Light to moderate work like slicing should be done between elbow height and 20cm below elbow height. Heavy work like boning on a table should be done between a little below elbow height and hip height.
- Make sure knives are stored in individual pouches when not in use.
- Do not carry unsheathed knives by hand from one place to another.
- Keep cutting tools sharp.
- Sharpen knives away from your body.
- Make sure workers are far enough apart to reduce the risk of cutting one another.
- Provide training and refresher sessions on correct cutting techniques, knife-sharpening skills, identification of worn knives and methods for safe disposal.
- Do not use knives to transfer meat.
- Wear the right protective equipment for the task if you are working close to others.
- Wear well-fitting, cut-resistant gloves on the knife hand.

- Wear properly fitted guards or aprons that cover you from the chest down to the upper thigh areas.

Plant, equipment and machinery

Many injuries occur in the meat retail industry from using machinery such as:

- bandsaws
- mixers
- sausage machines
- mincers
- gravity and horizontal feed slicers
- bacon slicers
- meat tenderisers
- forklifts

Ways to control hazards

Here are some ways to reduce or remove risks when using plant, equipment and machinery in the meat retail industry.

- When using a bandsaw, be careful when cutting small portions of meat (for example, pork chops) as your hand moves closer to the blade.
- Adjust the bandsaw blade guard as close as possible to the cutting table to reduce the cutting area of the blade exposed to you.
- Knee- or foot-operated mushroom stop buttons should be located close to you when you are using a bandsaw, for emergency use.
- Limit continuous operating time on the bandsaw, as it is mentally and physically demanding.
- Provide a system of portioning jigs to enable small pieces of meat to be cut.
- Ensure bandsaw trays are large enough to hold the pieces of meat to be cut.
- Ensure the feed throat of a mincer or mixer is designed to stop you from touching the worm. Older machines may need to have the feed throat extended and narrowed, or a restrictor plate fitted and linked to the drive motor.
- Fit delivery guards that stop you touching the cutter knives. You should not be able to fit your fingers through guard holes.
- Fit a hopper guard or lid to stop access to the mixing paddles and worm. This guard/lid should link to the power supply to the motor.
- When using a mincer or mixer, use a push stick that cannot touch the worm to force meat down if the feed throat gets blocked.
- With slicers, use blade sharpeners with the guards in place. The slice thickness plate should be zero unless the machine has a detachable sharpener.
- When using a slicer, attach a suitable last-slice device or meat pusher to the carriage to stop your hand slipping onto the blade. The meat pusher should have a handle.

- Power driven bacon slicers should not be used for cutting slippery, small or unevenly shaped food that cannot be held or clamped to the carriage.
- A large plate guard located at the front of the slicer offers protection when using a power driven bacon slicer. The plate, other guards and the sharpener should be linked to the blade motor.

Lighting and floors

Good lighting reduces the risk of tired eyes and headaches, trips and falls, and mistakes when using knives and machinery.

Floors in the meat retail industry can become slippery from fat, blood, water and other waste material.

Ways to control hazards

- Make sure cold rooms have enough lighting. There should be a light switch inside the chamber, and an indicator light outside the chamber to show if the chamber light is on.
- Make sure light switches inside freezing chambers cannot be turned off from the outside.
- Make sure the routes to emergency exits can still be seen if lighting fails.
- Choose surfaces for floors, steps and ramps that are slip-resistant in wet or dry conditions, or treat existing floors to improve slip-resistance.
- Clean up spills immediately using a cleaner that can remove blood, fat and ice.
- Place strappings from meat cartons in the bin.

Cold rooms and other confined spaces

Refrigeration and freezing of meat is an important part of the meat retail industry. Cold rooms, chillers and freezers may present some risks to workers, including temperature and confined space risks.

You need to consider the following things that may affect the degree of risk with cold rooms:

- temperature
- air movement
- length of exposure
- workers clothing, and
- physical activity of the worker.

Ways to control hazards

- Make sure handling of frozen meat is limited in time to avoid hands and fingers losing feeling due to cold.
- Rotate workers so no one person is in a cold environment for long periods of time.
- Wear protective clothing. The clothing layer closest to the skin should be able to absorb sweat, especially if the activities involve physical exertion such as lifting, while the outside layer should be waterproof.
- You need to consider that some people are more sensitive to cold than others.

Scalds, burns and diseases

Scalds and burns can happen in the meat retail industry as a result of using extremely hot water for cleaning, as well as from using chemicals and electricity.

While exposure to diseases from animals is rare in meat retail outlets, statistics show that a lot of people who work in the industry have wart infections on their hands.

Ways to control hazards

- Wear boots, waterproof pants, spats worn outside of boots or long aprons that extend beneath the tops of rubber boots when cleaning floors.
- Ensure hoses are designed and maintained to withstand extremes of temperature and pressure.
- Treat cuts and abrasions immediately.

Other hazards

There are other hazards that, while not specific to the meat retail industry, can nevertheless affect workers in the industry.

These include:

- using hazardous substances such as chemicals;
- excessive noise in the workplace; and
- drugs and alcohol use.