Critical risk: Knife handling

Identifying the risk:

Knives are important tools in the meat industry. However, they are also one of the most dangerous utensils if they are not handled and used correctly and safely.

The most important thing to remember is that a sharp knife is a safe knife. Blunt knives require more grip and more force to do the job and therefore can result in serious strains and sprains to workers and can cause lasting injuries. Workers with sharp knives do not have to push the knife and therefore get less tired and sore over the course of the day.

Likewise, an operator using a blunt knife that needs to be forced through the meat is more likely to accidently stab themselves or those working around them.

Potential impact of the risk:

The number of injuries involving knives is a major concern in the meat processing industry. The most common type of injuries are lacerations. These often require medical attention and may need suturing or skin grafting.

Injuries include:

- cuts to the non-knife hand or arm (most common)
- cuts to the hand holding the knife which occur when the hand slips off the handle
- cuts which occur with a reverse grip and pulling back towards the body
- cuts to another person, inadvertently, where people are too close together when working
- sprains or strains (e.g. from the extra effort required to use knives that are not enough sharp).

Supervisor Responsibilities:

Supervisors have responsibilities in implementing and monitoring all procedures that apply to the work performed by the employees in their area.

This includes:
- instructing workers in safe and healthy work practices
- providing information on particular hazards in work tasks
- monitoring staff in how they apply safe work practices
- participating in changes to procedures where there are problems
- ensuring appropriate PPE is used and maintained correctly
- ensuring appropriate hazard information signs and other OH&S information is displayed
- ensuring any staff who receives a knife injury receives first aid treatment
- reporting the incident to the correct authority.

In summary, supervisors should provide relevant and practical information, training and supervision to all employees in their area.

**Preventing the risk:**

Avoid injuring yourself with a knife. Commonsense and concentration will help avoid knife accidents. Knife accidents are most likely to occur when workers are tired and not concentrating on the job they are doing. It is very easy to cut yourself when you become distracted from your job or careless in your approach to work.

Complacency is a common cause of knife accidents. Workers become so accustomed to handling knives they quickly forget how dangerous they are.

Make sure your staff receive adequate knife safety training. Always put knives in their pouch when not in use. Don’t talk with a knife in your hand especially if you ‘talk with your hands’. Don’t use a knife to move pieces of meat, especially to someone else e.g. a slicer to a packer. One slip and you’ve stabbed someone. Don’t use a knife as a scraper.

Apply the following rules to avoid injury.

- When using a sharpening stone, make sure the stone is on a slip-proof, flat surface.
- Make sure your steel has a safety guard between the handle and the body of the steel.
- When using a grindstone, make sure the rotation of the stone and the cutting edge of the blade are away from your body.
- If you drop your knife let it fall, don’t try to catch it.
- Always place your knife in the scabbard or pouch when not in use.
- Don’t use a blunt knife as you will need to use more force which gives you less control.
- Never take your eyes off the cutting path of the knife, if you must look away, stop cutting.
- Never cut towards yourself or towards another individual.
- Always be aware of the movement of people around you.
- Never fool around with a knife in your hand or fool around with others who may have a knife in their hand.
- Keep the handle of the knife clean and free of fat and grease at all times.

Personal protective equipment is a vital part of knife safety and workers should always use PPE when working with a knife. The range of PPE equipment used can include:

- mesh gloves
- mesh aprons
- cut resistant gloves
- arm guards.

**Hierarchy of control measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Types of control</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most effective</td>
<td>Elimination</td>
<td>Redesign the workplace to remove the need for inappropriate work practices e.g., using a knife to transfer meat by piercing and levering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Substitution</td>
<td>Replace old, blunt knives with well-designed and sharpened knives.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isolation</td>
<td>Redesign the workplace to minimise distractions from the task, reduce additional stressors and minimise fatigue e.g., reduce noise, provide comfortable working temperatures and reduce uncomfortable working postures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering controls</td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide sufficient work space for each worker to reduce the risk of one worker stabbing or cutting another.</td>
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</table>
### Least effective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative controls</th>
<th>Train staff in knife safety and sharpening knives. Provide training to allow safe and effective rotation, where appropriate, to minimise risk of occupational overuse injuries. Discuss SOPs and work instructions for knife safety during induction.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Protective Equipment</td>
<td>Wear cut-resistant gloves on the knife hand and a mesh gauntlet (or a combination of a mesh glove and arm guard) on the non-knife hand. Wear mesh aprons.</td>
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### Supplementary material:

- MINTRAC Knife maintenance, safety and hygiene DVD
- MLA OHS Reference Guide Australian Meat Industry CD
- Knife Safety Checklist developed by AMIC

### Further information:
