

Safety and health alert

03/97 Two meat workers shot by cattle stun guns

Incident

1. In Australind during October 1996, an abattoir worker was attempting to stun a troublesome animal with a Schermer model ME stun gun (trigger type) when he knocked the stun gun on the side of the knocking box and it discharged into his stomach.
2. The second was in Northam during September 1996. This time the abattoir worker, in his fifth week of training experienced a misfire with his Cash 8000 Bulldozer Stun Gun (a tap type). While dismantling the stun gun it accidentally fired, embedding the captive bolt into his right hand. He sustained a severed tendon, pierced artery and broken bones.

Factors

Factors that contributed to one or both of these incidents included:-

- lack of knowledge of the safe use of the stun gun;
- lack of training;
- both workers were in a hurry;
- lack of restraint of the animal's head; and
- use of guns with only one firing mechanism.

Recommendations

1. All workers required to use a stun gun should be provided with a personal copy of the operating instructions for the stun gun they are required to use. As a minimum, the operating instructions must be shared with these workers and care taken to ensure they understand these requirements.
2. Only authorised trained personnel should be allowed to handle the stun gun and cartridges, and signage in the knocking box workstation should reflect this.
3. These stun guns must be regularly inspected and maintained in accordance with their operating instructions. Operators must be allowed access to these maintenance records. Misfires must only be remedied by competent personnel.
4. Stun guns with better inbuilt safety features should be considered to prevent accidental firing. This includes double-firing mechanisms and those which allow the operator to hold the gun firmly in both hands.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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