

Health and safety snapshot

Abattoir – Meat Processing Project

Issued February 2026



WorkSafe's Abattoir – Meat Processing Project aimed to raise awareness of common workplace hazards and risks, and improve work health and safety standards across the meat processing industry.

19 abattoirs were inspected by WorkSafe's regional, agricultural and industrial teams.

Enforcement actions taken

- **562** improvement notices
- **6** prohibition notices
- **73** verbal directions.



Health and safety representation

Of the businesses inspected:



35% had at least one Health and Safety Representative (HSR)



53% had a Work Health and Safety Committee.

Top 10 reasons for notices

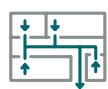
1. Guarding of plant:

81 notices



2. Provision of safe layout including floor demarcation:

52 notices



3. Maintenance and inspection of mobile plant:

20 notices



4. Emergency stops:

18 notices



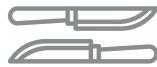
5. Labelled operational controls:

14 notices



6. Knife management (systems of work for use and storage):

13 notices



7. Bandsaw isolation:

13 notices



8. Providing or maintaining first aid equipment for hazardous chemicals:

12 notices



9. Test and tag:

11 notices



10. Obtaining and providing safety data sheets:

11 notices



Guarding of machinery

Common guarding issues included:

- unguarded carcass conveyer chain sprockets
- unguarded conveyor bearings and motors
- unguarded or insufficiently guarded augers, hoppers and mills.



Good practice systems identified

- Presence-sensing safety systems were used with bandsaws in most abattoirs.





Primary focus: usage and care of knives

Knives cause the most lost time injuries as they are the most common tool used by meat processing workers.



Common issues identified included:

- Workers walking around the workplace with exposed knives
- Knives being left unsecured and loose around the workplace
- Workers sharpening knives near other workers or while walking around the workplace
- Workers using damaged knives
- Knives being used for purposes they were not designed for.

Risk assessments for the use and maintenance of knives can identify the administrative controls needing to be administered through training and enforcement of policies and procedures to reduce injury risks from knives.

The best practice system observed involved asset tracking where workers received a sharp, sterilised knife at the start of their shift.

The knives were returned at the end of the shift for checking, resharpening and storage. The checking and tracking meant unusable knives were properly disposed of and new trackable knives were provided.

Helpful publications

For help in making your meat processing business safer, check out these publications:



- [Abattoir checklist](#)
- [Managing risks of plant in the workplace: Code of practice](#)
- [Safety alert 05/2021 Fatal knife injury at abattoir](#)

Opportunity for improvement identified

Some of the areas of improvement include:

- adding appropriate guarding on plant
- requiring completion of pre-start checks prior to operation of powered mobile plant
- having compliant emergency stops, such as being accessible to all workers using the plant
- labelling operator controls with its function
- having administrative controls, such as signage, supervision and training, to alert worker to dangers of the plant they are using
- maintaining plant to manufacturer's instruction or when worn or damaged
- ensuring operators are appropriately trained and licensed to use mobile plant
- implementing a traffic management system where mobile plant is used
- adding attachments designed and approved for the machinery
- installing and using compliant fall restraint systems when engineering prevention systems cannot be installed.



Prosecution – fatal incident

In August 2025, Western Australian Meat Marketing Co-operative Ltd [was fined \\$785,000 plus costs for failing to provide and maintain a safe work environment](#) after a worker suffered fatal crush injuries after being drawn into an item of plant.



The absence of guarding on the machine removed a layer of protection from the moving parts for workers. The business has since installed guarding on these machines to prevent a person accessing moving parts.