

THE HUMANE SLAUGHTER MYTH



An Animal Aid Investigation into UK Slaughterhouses

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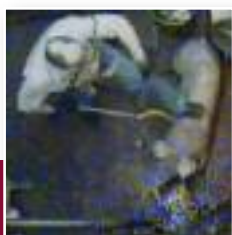




THE HUMANE SLAUGHTER MYTH

An Animal Aid Investigation into UK Slaughterhouses

Researched and written by Kate Fowler



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... we filmed 1,747 animals being stunned and 1,136 animals being slaughtered ...



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Between January and June 2009, Animal Aid secretly filmed in three randomly chosen British slaughterhouses:

- **JV Richards (Rietfontein) Ltd in Cornwall – pigs, sheep, calves; filmed on five occasions**
- **AC Hopkins (Taunton) Ltd in Somerset – pigs, sheep; filmed on four occasions**
- **Pickstock Ashby Ltd in Derbyshire – cows; filmed on two occasions**

We filmed 1,747 animals being stunned and 1,136 animals being slaughtered. The investigation was undertaken in response to the plethora of television programmes and ‘celebrity’ chefs who have sought to present the slaughter of farmed animals as pain-free, clean and quick.

IN 40 HOURS OF FOOTAGE ANIMAL AID FILMED...

- Animals going to the knife without adequate stunning
- Animals stunned and then allowed to come round again

- Ewes being stunned while a lamb suckled them
- Ewes watching as their young are killed
- A sheep too sick to stand – or possibly already dead – being brought to slaughter in a wheelbarrow
- Pigs falling from the slaughter line into the blood pit and being dragged out and re-shackled while other pigs look on
- An inadequately stunned young calf lying kicking on the floor while the stun operator stands on him to keep him still
- Animals screaming and struggling to escape
- Animals being kicked in the face and thrown to the floor
- Animals with illness or injury being slaughtered
- Electric tongs used as a goad

As well as a number of dramatic and shocking incidents, the hours of footage obtained clearly illustrate systemic failures in the stunning and slaughtering of animals and bring into question issues of training, assessment and enforcement.

Animal Aid’s investigation has yielded one immutable fact: in the modern world of meat and milk production, there is no such thing as humane slaughter.

AS A RESULT OF THIS INVESTIGATION, ANIMAL AID IS CALLING FOR:

- CCTV to be installed in all slaughterhouses, and its film to be made available to a panel that includes a representative of Animal Aid.
- Ongoing training for all abattoir workers and a change in the law so that they are formally re-tested every three years.
- The immediate revocation of the AC Hopkins’ stun operator/ slaughterer’s licence, and his prosecution to answer charges that he breached animal welfare law.
- An independent investigation into the reasons for this worker’s deficient performance, including an assessment of the role of the AC Hopkins’ management, the Meat Hygiene Service and the Official Veterinarians.



TWO YOUNG CALVES WATCH AS A FELLOW CALF IS STUNNED

... in many cases, the suffering inflicted, the terror experienced and the insensitivity of the stun operator was utterly shocking ...



INTRODUCTION

In recent months, the industry has sought to convince the public that animals slaughtered for their meat experience a 'humane' death. In mocked-up mini-abattoirs under studio lights, a single animal is typically led in and – with the world watching – is killed by an experienced slaughterman using best practice and taking his time to stun accurately and efficiently, and to slaughter by the rulebook.

In reality, hundreds or thousands of animals might be killed in one abattoir in a single day. None of them will experience the kind of 'humane' slaughter showcased on television. Instead, our film shows pigs and sheep kicked and shoved into the stun room, and frightened animals running and twisting in panic. In the melee, animals slipped, fell and cried out. All too often, the electric stunning tongs made contact for too short a time or did not span the brain, and delivered, instead, nothing more than painful electric shocks.



AT THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE

Animals brought to the abattoir may be held for several hours, including overnight, in an area called a 'lairage'. They wait there in pens before being taken either to the stun room, if they are sheep, pigs or calves, or to the stun box, if they are cows. Groups of animals will be brought to the stun room and, one at a time, they will be stunned by a powerful electric current that passes through their brains via tongs placed on either side of their heads. Cows will be stunned using a 'captive bolt', which shoots a retractable bolt into their brains at high pressure. All animals will then be shackled and hoisted and have the main blood vessels in their throats or chests severed.

In many cases, the suffering inflicted, the terror experienced and the insensitivity of the stun operator were utterly shocking. The three abattoirs in which we filmed were randomly chosen. One slaughters cattle; the other two slaughter pigs and sheep, and, when we filmed, one of them also slaughtered calves. The footage taken provides a snapshot of the British slaughter industry and indicates that, across the country, millions of animals every year suffer extreme fear and physical pain as they are killed for human consumption.

While it may be tempting to lay the blame solely with those who stun the animals and wield the knife, the responsibility for so much animal suffering must be shared – between the consumer, the monitoring and training agencies, the government and the industry.

We filmed:

- 1071 sheep being stunned
- 473 pigs being stunned
- 862 sheep being slaughtered
- 240 pigs being slaughtered
- 34 lambs being stunned
- 12 calves being stunned
- 34 lambs being slaughtered
- 157 cows being stunned



... the slaughterer used the electric stunning tongs as a goad, in addition to administering regular kicks ...

PRE-STUNNING STRESS

ROUGH HANDLING AND VIOLENCE

Animals brought to the stun room experienced assaults and severe stresses, even before they were stunned.

Groups of pigs and sheep often sensed danger as they approached the stun room door and turned to leave. To speed things along, the frightened animals were sometimes kicked and shoved inside. They were shouted at and slapped on their rumps, even when there was no space into which those being hit could move. Some sheep who did not move fast enough were picked up by their fleece or by their ears and thrown to the ground. In one instance, an unwilling sheep was dragged into the stun room by his head. Once inside, the rough handling and violence continued. At JV Richards, it was routine to kick pigs in the face to force them to move.

So habitual was this behaviour that, on more than one occasion, pigs were kicked in the face even when the workers did not appear to be trying to make them move. And the worker charged with shackling the pigs kicked out in anger as a scared animal – who was running around the room and screaming – ran into him and hurt his hand.

At AC Hopkins, as one pig walked over the top of another pig, who was lying partially stunned on the floor in the overcrowded room, the stun operator shouted angrily and then lashed out at him with the tongs, delivering an electric shock.

'No person shall lift or drag, or cause or permit to be lifted or dragged, any animal by the head, horns, ears, feet, tail, fleece or any other part of its body in such a way as to cause it unnecessary pain or suffering.'

Schedule 3, Part III, Paragraph 7 The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995

'No person shall inflict any blow or kick to any animal.'

Schedule 3, Part III, Paragraph 12 The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995

A PIG RECEIVES A CASUAL KICK IN THE HEAD





GOADING

At AC Hopkins, the slaughterer used the electric stunning tongs as a goad – in addition to administering regular kicks – to make the pigs move to a more convenient position for him. One pig was touched 13 times with the electric tongs. While we cannot say with certainty that each and every one of those contacts administered an electric shock, there is good reason to believe from the pig's response that some did. The goads were administered to their backs, shoulders, necks and ears.

'No person shall use or cause or permit to be used, any electrical stunning or killing equipment or any other instrument which applies an electric current to [pigs or cows] as a means of making an animal move unless such shocks are applied only to the muscles of the hindquarters.'

*Schedule 3, Part II, Paragraph 11
The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995*

UNNECESSARY NOISE

Slaughterhouses can be extremely noisy. Gates clang, machinery whirrs, sounds from the butchery area spill over and, of course, animals vocalise. But much of the noise is

unnecessary and could clearly be seen to frighten the animals. Chains, which are used to shackle the animals once stunned, moved through into the stun room with considerable force. Not only were animals in their way hit by them, but also the noise was sudden and shocking, and the animals reacted fearfully. In one case, a worker at JV Richards banged out a rhythm on a wall using a chain – an additional and unnecessary noise. We saw workers regularly shout to one another and sing loudly along with the blaring radio. Machinery was left running, even when not being used.

'Noise from equipment and machinery is under the direct control of the operators. A greater attempt must be made to dampen sources of noise or make use of more suitable materials so as to reduce noise levels.'

Paragraph 65, Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing, Part 1: Red Meat, Farm Animal Welfare Council, 2003

A PIG IS GOADED ON THE SHOULDERS



FRIGHTENING ODOURS

Animals brought into the stun room often showed great reluctance, and part of their fear may be related to the smells within. Blood and urine in the room were not cleaned up between groups of animals. In one case, a pig entered the stun room at JV Richards, sniffing all the while and – realising that danger was present – ran out squealing.

SLIPPERY AND UNEVEN FLOORS

Blood and urine left on the floor of the stun room can only add to the slipperiness underfoot. Our films show that animals routinely lost their footing. Some fell over and their bodies hit the ground.

In the bovine stun box, the sloping floor is designed to help the bodies of the stunned animals roll out into a convenient location for the slaughterers to shackle and hoist them. But the uneven surface is a serious cause of stress for some of the cows who cannot get a secure footing.

DELAYS

‘Animals must not be placed in stunning pens unless the operator who is to stun them is ready to do so as soon as the animal is placed in the pen.’

Guidance Note on the Licensing and Training of Slaughtermen, Defra

While animals are not supposed to be brought into the stun pen unless the operator is ready to stun them immediately, breaches were commonplace. At AC Hopkins, one group of pigs was left alone in the stun pen for six-and-a-half minutes but at JV Richards animals were left for much longer. One group of pigs was left for 13 minutes; another group for 15 minutes; while a group of sheep was left in the stun pen for almost 20 minutes.

A common practice at both AC Hopkins and JV Richards was to leave the last few sheep

A TYPICALLY CROWDED STUN ROOM



from one group in the stun pen and bring in a new group to join them. Because of this, some sheep were not stunned with their original group, or even with the next group of animals. This increased the time they spent in the room, watching other animals being stunned, shackled and bled. One sheep at JV Richards was kept in the stun pen for 20 minutes while groups of sheep were brought in, stunned and killed around her.

One source of delays could easily have been avoided: the lack of chains at AC Hopkins. Sheep and pigs were held in the stun room for extended periods while the chains were fed back from the slaughter line. In one period lasting a little more than an hour, in which seven groups of sheep were stunned, more than eight minutes were wasted waiting for chains.

SUMMARY OF MAIN CAUSES OF PRE-STUN STRESS

- Rough handling and violence
- Goadng
- Unnecessary noise
- Frightening odours
- Slippery and uneven floors
- Delays

... in reality the stun rooms were packed with frightened animals, running and twisting ...



STUNNING

ELECTRICAL STUNNING

Pigs, sheep and calves are stunned by electrocution. Tongs are placed on either side of the head and a large current is passed through the brain in order to render the animal immediately unconscious. At least, that is what is supposed to happen.

‘With hand held equipment a successful stun is heavily dependent on the skill of the operator to position the electrodes accurately and the delivery of sufficient current to render the animal unconscious.’

Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at Slaughter or Killing, Part I: Red Meat Animals, Farm Animal Welfare Council, 2003

In reality, the stun rooms were packed with frightened animals, running and twisting. All too often, the tongs made contact for too short a time or did not span the brain, and delivered, instead, nothing more than a painful electric shock.

Even when administered correctly, there remains concern that some animals – due to a variation in their susceptibility to the current – are rendered immobile, rather than unconscious. This could even apply to most animals because of the inherent shortcomings of stunning itself. If this is the case, the number of animals going to the knife while conscious would be far higher than is commonly believed.



PROBLEMS WITNESSED WITH ELECTRICAL STUNNING

Incorrect Electrode Placement

In the stun rooms at both AC Hopkins and JV Richards, animals ran, hid, slipped and fell. Under such chaotic circumstances, the correct placement of electrodes on the heads of the animals – and maintaining the connection for the required duration – is problematic at best.

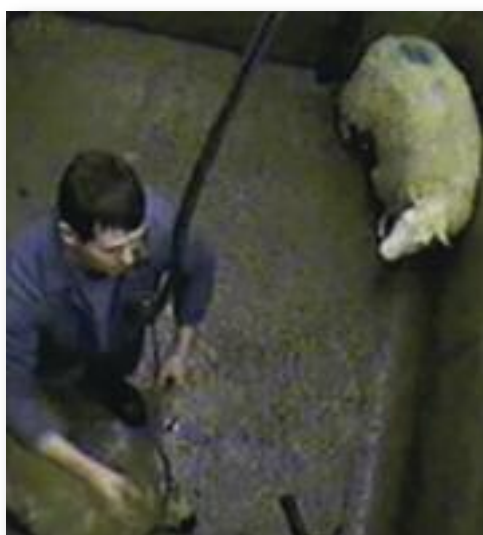
Incorrect placement of tongs was commonplace at AC Hopkins and not uncommon at JV Richards. The electrodes for sheep and pigs are meant to be placed between the eye and the ear on each side of the head. Other placements are permitted as long as the current passes directly through the brain. For a significant number of animals, the electrodes were placed on either side of their noses. For the stun operator at AC Hopkins, sloppiness was the norm.

‘No person shall strike, or apply pressure to, any particularly sensitive part of the body of any animal.’

Schedule 3, Part III, Paragraph 12

The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995

At AC Hopkins, a significant number of sheep were stunned with one electrode on the very tip of their nose and the other at the back of their head. The tip of the nose is a sensitive part of the body, and this is a breach of the welfare legislation. Not only that, such tong



positioning increases the likelihood of ineffective stunning and consequent suffering.

No person shall use electrodes to stun any animal unless the electrodes are so placed that they span the brain, enabling the current to pass through it.

Schedule 5, Part II, Paragraph 8 The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995

And for other animals, the electrodes did not even span the brain. One sheep at AC Hopkins was 'stunned' with electrodes on either side of one ear only. Apparently, the stun operator considered this sufficient and allowed that sheep to go on to be slaughtered without additional stunning.

A lamb was 'stunned' with both electrodes on top of her head, and then an additional stun was made with both electrodes on the back of her neck.

Duration

It was clear that some animals required longer stuns than others. For some animals, a two-second stun rendered them immobile. For others, a stun of the same duration caused them only to wriggle free and shake their heads, in pain but alert and conscious.

Within the abattoirs and among the same species, there was a wide variation in the duration of each stun.

For example, sheep from within the same group at JV Richards were stunned for between 2.5 and 4.5 seconds, with the average stun time being 3.3 seconds. While the operator stunned the sheep, a second worker shackled them. But in the very next group, when the stun operator both stunned and shackled the animals unaided, the average stun time was 2.6 seconds. The shorter stun time may be attributed to the fact that the operator felt he should work more quickly once he was on his own or, perhaps, he became less thorough when he thought no one was watching.

At AC Hopkins, sheep in a typical group were stunned for between less than a second and three seconds, with an average stun time of 1.9 seconds – a significantly shorter timespan than at JV Richards. While we do not know the amperage used at each establishment, the brief – almost cursory – stuns administered at AC Hopkins are in keeping with, what seemed to us, the general incompetence and insensitivity displayed there.

The method used to stun pigs at AC Hopkins was particularly distressing to observe. All the pigs were given an initial brief stun, which was just long enough to bring them down, but not long enough to render them unconscious. The pain this caused them was shockingly apparent. A number of pigs fell to the ground screaming and began kicking and convulsing so violently that the shackles could not be attached. It was abundantly clear that these pigs were suffering.



The frustration felt by the stun operator at not being able to shackle these convulsing pigs did not lead him to stun subsequent animals properly but, instead, caused him to vent his frustration by shouting and swearing at the suffering animals. He held them down with his foot or knelt on them in order to hold them sufficiently still to shackle them. Only after they had been shackled and hoisted, did he administer a second stun of longer duration. In other words, most were shackled before they were properly stunned.

No person shall suspend, or cause or permit to be suspended, any animal before stunning or killing.
Schedule 4, Paragraph 4 The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995

Choosing to stun the pigs in this way may have been intended to reduce the stun-to-stick interval to below the recommended 15 second limit (see page 16 for more on the stun-to-stick interval), as counting would begin from the start of the second stun, rather than the first. But administering what is little more than a serious electric shock in order to floor animals without rendering them unconscious is a markedly inhumane act and is to be condemned.

However, a small number of pigs were stunned properly the first time, either because the operator had begun stunning the animals before any chains had arrived to shackle them and so he had to continue stunning until they arrived, or because he continued stunning while chatting to a colleague. Those pigs who were administered a long first stun kicked less, or not at all, on the hoist. This indicated that a thorough first stun would have been both more humane and more practical, in that there was less chance of the slaughterer being struck by flailing limbs, and less chance of the animal slipping from the shackles – not uncommon for pigs – and falling to the ground.

Failed and Multiple Stuns

Failed stuns and consequent repeat stuns were commonplace in both abattoirs using electrical stunning. For many animals, the first partial stun was so painful that only the most insensitive worker would not have moved quickly to end that suffering by immediately administering a second and complete stun.

However, the stun operator at AC Hopkins regularly permitted partially stunned animals to suffer while he turned his attentions to other animals. For example,

- A sheep was stunned on her nose for half a second only. She escaped but fell to the floor, thrashing. Four other sheep were stunned before this one was put out of her misery.
- Another sheep reared up and fell to the floor while the stun was being administered. The operator, assuming she would stay on the ground, turned his back to cut the throat of the previous sheep who was already nearing the top of the hoist. But, instead, she struggled to her feet and made her way unsteadily to the hoist machinery, where she tried to hide. Still unable to get her footing, the stun operator noticed her but ignored her plight and turned to stun another sheep instead.
- The electrodes merely skirted the head of one pig who screamed and fell to the floor, convulsing. While this pig thrashed at his feet, the stun operator calmly adjusted the equipment. The pig struggled to his feet but collapsed once more. While two more pigs were stunned, this one sat on his haunches, with his head tipped back and gasping. Leaning on another pig for support, he collapsed back to the floor when that pig was also stunned. Back on his feet once more, he was goaded and finally stunned.

Similar failings could also be found at JV Richards.

- One sheep, who was stunned for just one second, fell to the floor, flailing on his side. He scrabbled to his feet and tried to run on uncoordinated legs. He eventually

hid behind the hoist machinery. Rather than end his fear and suffering, seven other sheep were stunned and hoisted before the operator turned his attention to this one. Sadly, the second stun was also botched and only when the tongs were applied for a third time, did this sheep finally succumb.

- Another sheep was stunned for two seconds – a common stun duration for sheep at this establishment – but instead of losing consciousness, she struggled over onto her back and ‘escaped’. She hid amongst a group of sheep, keeping her head ducked. The stun operator stunned another sheep before lunging for her again. She dodged the tongs. After stunning four more sheep, he made a third attempt, administering a stun of less than one second. She escaped again. On the fourth attempt – and after six more sheep had been stunned – she was finally stunned properly.

Animals who had been partially stunned were, understandably, much more eager to avoid being stunned again. They kept away from the stun operator, hid their heads beneath other animals, and tried to conceal themselves behind the hoist.

And some animals went to extraordinary lengths to avoid experiencing the pain of being stunned again. One sheep at JV



A YOUNG LAMB LEAPS INTO THE TONG BUCKET FOR ‘REFUGE’



SHEEP WATCH A FALLEN GROUP MEMBER



THE AC HOPKINS WORKER REACHES OUT IN A PACKED STUN ROOM

Richards was the sixth out of a group of 19 to be stunned. He struggled free of the tongs and ran around the room, avoiding the stun operator while 12 other sheep were stunned. This left him still

standing at the end of the group with just one other sheep.

A second attempt was made to stun him but – once again – he escaped. As the other sheep succumbed, this terrified animal found the only ‘exit’ and leapt through the hatch and into the slaughter area, where he landed in the blood pit beneath a number of shackled and bleeding animals.

‘The strength and the duration of the current used is such that the animal is immediately rendered unconscious and remains so until it is dead.’

*Schedule 5, Part II, Paragraph 8
The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter
or Killing) Regulations 1995*

At JV Richards 14.6 per cent of the 824 sheep we monitored were stunned more than once. One was stunned five times, while four were stunned four times each. At AC Hopkins, 12.2 per cent of the 287 sheep we monitored were stunned more than once.

Almost all the pigs at JV Richards were stunned first time. At AC Hopkins the opposite was the case: 99.6 per cent of the pigs we monitored were stunned at least twice, with several being stunned four times.

Over-full Stun Room

Sometimes the number of animals in the stun room was so large that even passing through the room was extremely difficult. That does not, however, excuse pushing a sheep out of the way with so much force that she fell splayed on the ground (seen at AC Hopkins). Achieving a good connection with the electrodes proved difficult in such a crowded environment. This problem was exacerbated at AC Hopkins by its stun operator attempting to stun the animal closest to the hoist, even when other animals were between him and the animal he chose to stun (see picture above).

‘If the pen is too full at the beginning it may be difficult for operators to move freely, or position the stunning equipment accurately (with the risk of accidental pre-stun shocks with head only electrical equipment) and there may be difficulties in shackling animals quickly.’

*Report on the Welfare of Farmed Animals at
Slaughter or Killing, Part I: Red Meat Animals,
Farm Animal Welfare Council, 2003*

Lack of Care and Attention

The AC Hopkins stun operator, in our view, displayed great incompetence, and inadequate stuns were commonplace throughout our film.

However, he may have made slightly fewer errors had he not

been chatting to, and joking with, his colleagues at times. In one instance, while he held a conversation with the slaughterer, he made only a momentary jab with the electrodes on the side of a pig's head. The tongs slipped as she slid in the blood that covered the floor. The tongs reconnected under her jaw and she emitted a strangled cry as she went down, kicking. Had he been looking at her and focusing on his work instead of on his colleague, she may not have had to endure such pain.

SUMMARY OF MAIN PROBLEMS WITH ELECTRICAL STUNNING

- Incorrect electrode placement
- Insufficient duration of stun
- Failed and multiple stunning
- Over-full stun room
- Lack of care and attention

CAPTIVE BOLT STUNNING

All the cows – and one single sheep in our film – were stunned using a captive bolt. A hand-held device shoots out a retractable bolt under high pressure from either a blank cartridge or compressed air into the brain of the animal. The cows at Pickstock abattoir in Derbyshire were stunned using a contact firing captive bolt, whereas one sheep at AC Hopkins was stunned using a captive bolt that was trigger-operated.

Contact firing guns are struck against the animal's head to force the bolt to fire. The advantage of such guns over those that are trigger operated is that their use reduces the likelihood of an inadequate stun due to holding the gun too far away from the head. Unlike electrical stunning, captive bolt stunning is an irreversible method of stunning an animal. If done correctly, the brain damage is so extensive that the animals cannot regain consciousness. It is unclear why the stun operator at AC Hopkins chose to use the captive bolt on one single sheep when all the others were stunned electrically, although the pleasure



he gained from using this method could be surmised from the gesture he made towards a colleague: he mimed the drawing of a gun, and sung some bars from the James Bond theme tune.

This was the last sheep of the group and, having seen all the others stunned and killed, he was hiding behind the machinery. From the film, it appears that he was shot in the back of his head at an angle down towards his eyes, which is not the correct angle for a sheep without horns.¹ (The correct angle is directly downwards from the top of the head, to ensure that the bolt hits the brain.) Sheep *with* horns may be stunned this way but in that instance, 'bleeding must commence within 15 seconds of shooting'.² This sheep wasn't bled for at least 25 seconds.

The apparently incorrect angle and the thrashing of this sheep in a manner unlike any of the others who were stunned electrically, causes serious doubt about whether this sheep was adequately stunned when he was slaughtered.

'In such cases [where horned sheep are shot in the back of the head] bleeding must commence within 15 seconds of shooting.'

Guidance Note on the Licensing and Training of Slaughtermen, Defra

It is normal practice to stun cows using the captive bolt. Individual cows are brought into the stun box down a narrow 'race', which does not allow them to turn round and leave. One at a time, they enter the box. The gate closes behind them and they are stunned. Head restraint devices are required by legislation to hold a bovine's head for captive bolt stunning.

The purpose of the legislation was to improve stunning accuracy. 'Active' head restraints hold the head in place and cause additional stress.

Pickstock abattoir, however, uses a passive 'head shelf', which encourages the animal to place his or her head in the best position for the stun to be accurate and causes little – if any – additional stress.

PROBLEMS WITNESSED WITH CAPTIVE BOLT STUNNING

While the use of a captive bolt for stunning cattle was certainly less stressful than the chaos and carelessness of electrical stunning, this method is not without its disasters.

Failed and Multiple Stunning

Six cows – or 4 per cent of those we filmed – were not stunned adequately first time. For one, a pale brown bull, the design of the stun box contributed to his prolonged suffering. Perhaps sensing danger as he entered the stun box, he lowered his head beneath the restraint shelf and did not respond to the stun operator's attempts to get him to raise it. Rather than wait, the stun operator leant over and took an ill-advised shot, which floored the bull but did not render him unconscious. He lay kicking on the floor several feet below the stun operator and could not easily be reached. Thirty-five seconds after the first shot, the operator was forced to suspend himself upside down from the

OPERATOR TAKES AN UPSIDE-DOWN SECOND SHOT AT A BULL



cross beam in order to take a second shot and end the suffering of this animal (see photo page 13).

Two other cows had to be re-stunned once they left the stun box. And the stunning of at least three other cows was questionable: one was not shot cleanly and the cow dropped to the floor, flailing. The stun operator prepared for a second shot but, in the end, did not take it. From the sound made by the captive bolt in the second questionable incident, it misfired twice. The animal stumbled, indicating that she did, indeed, feel some force from the gun, but was only properly stunned on the third attempt.

And perhaps most worrying of all, after stunning and rolling out to be hoisted, one bull could be seen to blink as he lay on the ground, indicating that the stun was not effective. According to Professor of Animal Science, Temple Grandin: 'Animals with eyes that do spontaneous natural blinking are sensible.'³

Entrance Gate

The entrance gate to the stun box closes behind the animals to keep them static and to prevent other animals from trying to enter. But staff at the Pickstock plant used the gate as a means of encouraging reluctant animals into the box by lowering it onto their backs. In most cases, this had the desired effect and the animal moved forward. But for one frightened animal, the gate descending onto her back virtually knocked her over and created greater panic. She struggled to



A COW ABOUT TO BE SHACKLED AND HAVE HER THROAT CUT

AN EMACIATED DAIRY COW AWAITS THE CAPTIVE BOLT



regain her footing and ended up with her front hooves on the head shelf, from where she was stunned.

Sloping Floor

Stun boxes are fitted with sloping or stepped floors in order to allow the bodies of the stunned animals to roll out into a convenient position for shackling. The uneven floor at Pickstock caused distress to a number of cows who could not get their footing while in the box.

SUMMARY OF MAIN PROBLEMS WITH CAPTIVE BOLT STUNNING

- Failed and multiple stunning
- Mis-use of entrance gate
- Sloping floor

... those who kicked free from the shackles,
were shouted at and cursed ...



SHACKLING

After being stunned, the animals are shackled by one or both back legs, hoisted and taken to the kill area.

Attaching shackles to a stunned animal can be difficult if that animal kicks violently after being stunned but for the first 20 seconds after stunning – what researchers call the ‘tonic’ phase – the animal collapses and becomes rigid. If the animal has been properly and competently stunned, attaching shackles immediately after stunning should not prove problematic.

However, an inadequate stun – such as we saw for almost all pigs at AC Hopkins – caused many pigs to kick and thrash so violently that attaching shackles was virtually impossible. Rather than deliver an effective stun the first time, the stun operator chose to stand or kneel on the thrashing pigs in order to hold them still enough to shackle them. Those who kicked free of the shackles, were shouted at and cursed.

Effective shackling appears to be a particular problem for pigs, who fall from them more frequently than sheep. We did not witness any cows falling from the shackles.

A number of pigs at AC Hopkins fell from the hoist before they were ‘stuck’ (met the knife) and both sheep and pigs fell from the slaughter line at AC Hopkins and JV Richards after being cut, as the suspended animals began to kick, thrash and paddle.

They crashed into the pit while blood from the dying animals above them, rained down. They were left in the congealing blood until a convenient time when they could be dragged out, re-shackled and hoisted once again.

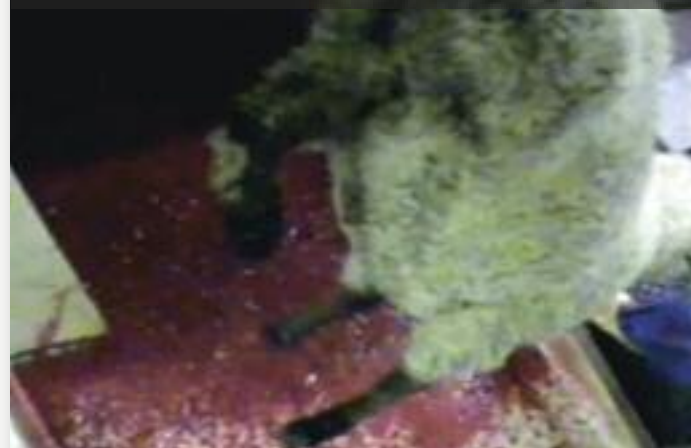
AFTER STUNNING, A YOUNG CALF'S LIMBS ARE STILL THRASHING, SO HE IS STOOD ON WHILE SHACKLED



A 'STUCK' PIG SLIPS HIS SHACKLES AND CRASHES TO THE GROUND



A SHEEP SHACKLED ABOVE THE BLOOD PIT





... until 2004, it was illegal to slaughter and bleed animals within sight of conspecifics (animals of the same species) because it was thought to cause them distress ...

STUN-TO-STICK INTERVAL



A PIG'S THROAT IS CUT

Electrical 'head only' stunning is reversible. If animals are not bled immediately, there is a chance that they will regain consciousness before they die. Scientific evidence supports the recommendation that stun-to-bleed intervals should not exceed 15 seconds.

Until 2004, it was illegal to slaughter and bleed animals within sight of conspecifics

(animals of the same species) because it was thought to cause them distress. Moving the stunned animals away from their mates to a place where they could be slaughtered without being seen increased the stun-to-stick time, thereby increasing the risk that the animals would regain consciousness.

In its June 2003 report, Defra's advisory body, the Farm Animal Welfare Council, recommended that 'the law in England and Wales should be changed to permit bleeding within sight of conspecifics for pigs and sheep. This should be dependent upon legislation being introduced to limit the stun-to-bleed interval to 15 seconds.'⁴

The government did indeed change the law so that pigs and sheep could be bled within sight of their conspecifics but chose not to legislate for a maximum stun-to-bleed time of 15 seconds. In terms of animal welfare, they legislated for the worst of both worlds: sheep and pigs could see their mates bleed to death but the government preferred to issue guidance, rather than introduce a law to minimise the risk of them regaining consciousness.⁵

Before the law on bleeding in sight of conspecifics was changed, the Meat Hygiene Service found in its 1997/8 Animal Welfare Survey Report, that, for many pigs, the stun-to-stick time exceeded the recommended maximum figure of 15 seconds.⁶



A CALF MEETS THE KNIFE



Now that the law has changed and the stun-to-stick interval should have been reduced – as that was the purpose of the law – what does our film show?

At JV Richards, the film shows the time the animal was stunned until he or she leaves the stun room. It is reasonable – perhaps conservative – to add two seconds on to this time to get the estimated stun-to-stick interval.

- For 44 consecutively stunned sheep who were shackled by a second man, only 52 per cent were stuck within 15 seconds of being stunned, with the longest stun-to-stick interval being an estimated 21 seconds.
- For the rest of the session (90 more sheep), the stun operator worked alone, and the number of sheep stuck within 15 seconds of being stunned fell to a shocking 1 per cent.
- Of 100 sheep who were stunned consecutively at AC Hopkins, just 22 per cent were stuck within 15 seconds of being stunned. The longest stun-to-stick time recorded was 37 seconds.
- Of 72 pigs stunned consecutively at JV Richards, all left the stun room within 13

seconds, and should therefore have been ‘stuck’ approximately 15 seconds after stunning.

- Of 100 pigs who were stunned consecutively at AC Hopkins, 97 per cent were stuck within 15 seconds of being stunned *for the second time*, but achieving this meant that the animals suffered the pain of a partial first stun before a full and proper stun was administered. This is not a humane way to achieve the minimum stun-to-stick period.

With such dismal stun-to-stick times, there must be a very real danger that many sheep and pigs regain consciousness during bleeding or even before sticking.

‘Where one person is responsible for the stunning, shackling, hoisting and bleeding of animals, that person must carry out those operations consecutively on one animal before carrying them out on another animal.’
Guidance Note on the Licensing and Training of Slaughtermen, Defra

At AC Hopkins, the stun operator often also slaughtered the sheep and pigs. Instead of stunning, shackling, hoisting and cutting one animal before moving onto the next, it was common for him to stun two, leave one on the floor while he shackled the second, and then cut them both one after the other. This meant that some animals were left stunned on the floor for many valuable seconds, which increased both the stun-to-stick interval and the likelihood that the animals would regain consciousness.



... the pigs slaughtered there have an increased chance of regaining consciousness during bleeding



SLAUGHTER



After stunning, all animals are killed by severance of at least one of the carotid arteries or the vessels from which they arise. According to FAWC, current practice in Great Britain is to cut a minimum of both carotid arteries and jugular veins or a thoracic stick to ensure rapid exsanguination.⁷

The law states that 'any person engaged in the bleeding of any animal that has been stunned shall ensure that the bleeding is rapid, profuse and complete' and that 'the bleeding is completed before the animal regains consciousness'.⁸

Research has been conducted to discover which method of sticking produces the quickest rate of bleeding, bringing about the most rapid death and offering the lowest risk of the animal regaining consciousness. The results of a 2000 study indicated that, 'following head-only electrical stunning, a relatively long sticking wound should provide better welfare'.⁹

From our film at AC Hopkins, it appears that only a small incision is made when cutting

pigs. The knife appears to be inserted and removed without a long wound being made, If this is the case, the pigs slaughtered there have an increased chance of regaining consciousness during bleeding.



THREE FALLEN PIGS IN THE BLOOD PIT



A PIG IS RE-SHACKLED AFTER HAVING HIS THROAT CUT



... the ewes watched as the stunned young collapsed to the ground ...

VULNERABLE ANIMALS

Our footage shows sick animals and new mothers and their young being slaughtered for human consumption.

Sick Animals

One particularly sick – or possibly already dead – sheep was brought for slaughter to the JV Richards abattoir. A small, thin sheep, her fleece patchy and her head dropped, was brought into the stun room in a wheelbarrow (see picture below). Unlike all other sheep we saw stunned, she did not move at all – not when the electrodes were placed on her head, and not when she was shackled.

We believe this sheep may have been dead before she was stunned.

Several of the pigs and sheep (four at JV Richards and one at AC Hopkins) had large growths on their bodies, which may have been abscesses, cysts, prolapses or tumours.

According to industry insiders, such growths are not uncommon. In 2008, the BBC aired a film shot undercover at three Welsh slaughterhouses. Even though Meat Hygiene Inspectors are supposed to inspect only the carcasses presented to them, many were forced to take action to remove abscesses that the abattoir's butchers had overlooked or ignored.¹⁰

Mothers and their Young

At AC Hopkins, a group of four ewes and 14 very young lambs was brought in to be stunned and slaughtered. The ewes watched as the stunned young collapsed to the ground, and the lambs desperately sought solace from their mothers in those terrifying circumstances.



A EWE IS STUNNED WHILE HER YOUNG LAMB STILL SUCKLES



STUNNED IN THE WHEELBARROW,,,

While one lamb suckled her mother for comfort, the ewe – despite battling against the electrified tongs – succumbed and dropped to the floor. As the operator shackled and hoisted her mother, the lamb followed her body across the stun room before seeking out another ewe to take comfort from. A minute later, while she suckled from this second ewe, that sheep was also stunned. At Pickstock, ‘spent’ cows from the dairy industry were brought to slaughter with immense udders, signifying their motherhood. At JV Richards, a group of three calves – no more than a few days old – was brought to slaughter. As they were to be slaughtered in a registered abattoir and not simply shot on a dairy farm, it is reasonable to assume that they were being killed for their flesh: veal. While the first calf was stunned, the other two huddled together and looked on. Seconds later, the second calf was brought to the floor, and lay there shaking and kicking so violently that the stun operator was unable to shackle him. He held the calf down with his foot but the calf continued to kick violently. Like the first calf, he was stunned a second time as he was being hoisted into the slaughter room. The third young animal –

showing clear signs of fear and distress – vocalised and wriggled free of the electrodes. He did all he could to elude the tongs but was finally caught and stunned, and hoisted away to have his throat cut.

Ten days earlier, at the same slaughterhouse, we filmed nine more calves being stuck.



SHACKLED AND HOISTED BY ONE BACK LEG



... one pig laid across a stunned victim on the floor in an apparent attempt to prevent the pig from being taken away or further harmed ...

EMOTIONS OF THE ANIMALS



IN THE LAIRAGE...

Aside from the physical suffering, animals in abattoirs endure tremendous emotional anguish, proving beyond doubt that – despite the industry and government's oft-repeated line – slaughter in British abattoirs can never be humane.

Our footage shows that many of the animals sensed danger as they approached the stun pen and ran from the room. Those who entered often sought to leave again. Once

the door had closed behind them, and they saw members of their group stunned and twitching on the ground, the levels of fear rose among the remaining animals, especially among the final two or three sheep of each group.

Almost invariably, the final sheep to be standing after all the others in their group had been stunned and cut, reacted powerfully when faced with their own death. They became frantic, running around the room, hopelessly looking for a way out. It is hard to imagine the desperation that would lead a sheep to leap through a hatch and into a blood pit below where her mates were suspended and bleeding, but two sheep did this. Others leapt up at the wall or door, while many just kept running, trying to avoid the unavoidable.

THE DARK PIG ON THE RIGHT LEAPS FRANTICALLY AT THE DOOR IN AN ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE



There were many cases where a sheep would watch intently as another particular sheep was stunned and hoisted. It may be that there had been a close friendship between the two, which made the events especially harrowing for the one watching. This was also the case when the ewes and lambs were stunned and slaughtered at AC Hopkins. One lamb followed the body of the

ewe she had been suckling from as she was dragged across the room and hoisted.

The need of the lamb to be comforted was matched by the need of some animals to protect. A number of pigs appeared to be attempting to defend a mate. One pig laid across a stunned victim on the floor in an apparent attempt to prevent the pig from being taken away or further harmed. And in the same group, another pig lunged at the men, squealing, again in an apparent attempt to protect a friend.





... when the animals did not walk meekly to their deaths, they might be dragged, kicked, slapped, prodded, goaded, shouted at and abused ...

STAFF

Desensitised

In general, the slaughterhouse staff we filmed behaved as though the animals were inanimate objects. They did not speak to them and – for the most part – did not interact with them on a humane level. Rather, they acted as though they were disassembling objects that periodically infuriated them: when the animals did not walk meekly to their deaths, they might be dragged, kicked, slapped, prodded, goaded, shouted at and abused.

An indicator of the way animals are regarded at AC Hopkins can be found in the words 'Death Row', which have been spray-painted on the lairage wall.

Callousness

It is not surprising, perhaps, that slaughtermen quickly become desensitised and sloppy. But it is chilling that the line between desensitisation and callousness was, in our view, so routinely crossed by the slaughterman at AC Hopkins.

On several occasions he failed to stun animals adequately and – instead of immediately re-stunning them to end their suffering – he watched as they flailed on the floor, or sat on haunches gasping for breath.

There is no excuse for such behaviour. Rather than stun pigs thoroughly the first time, he was content to deliver a single, or a series of, electric shocks, which did little more than inflict serious pain and floor the animals. In his struggle to get the shackles onto a thrashing part-stunned sheep or pig, he showed his ineptitude as well as his insensitivity.

On occasions when he could easily stun an animal cleanly, he chose, instead, to goad



them into a position that was more convenient for him, by jabbing at them with the tongs.

Bullying

We should not be surprised that the bullying and insensitive treatment of animals spills over into other working relationships. In 2008, the Trade Union, UNISON, conducted a survey of Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) staff, which it represents. Their job is, first and foremost, to safeguard the health of the public but also to oversee the health and welfare of animals at slaughter.

There were 367 responses to the survey, 83 per cent of which were from meat hygiene inspectors, another five per cent from senior meat hygiene inspectors and one per cent from Official Veterinary Surgeons working in abattoirs. Thirty per cent of those surveyed worked at red meat abattoirs, like the ones we filmed in.

The damning answers reveal a lack of enforcement of the law and widespread bullying by abattoir workers and owners.

The stun operator lunged at a pig who simultaneously ducked her head. There was almost no connection at all but still she collapsed, and that was good enough for him. She was clearly in pain and kicking so hard that he could not attach the shackles to her hind leg. The animal was almost convulsing before an adequate stun was finally administered.

- AC Hopkins



ANOTHER VICTIM OF AN INADEQUATE STUN

2008 UNISON Survey of Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) Staff

Enforcement

Does the MHS management encourage you to report breaches of legislation with a view to enforcement proceedings?

Always	10%
Sometimes	41%
Never	43%

If you observed a breach of the regulations which seriously compromised consumer protection, how confident are you that the MHS would properly follow up any report you made?

Very	7%
Reasonably	37%
Not at all	52%

Do you believe that the MHS is truly independent of the industry?

Yes	7%
No	87%

Could the meat industry be trusted to carry out meat inspection on behalf of the consumer?

Yes	1%
No	94%

Bullying

Have you witnessed bullying or harassment at work?

Yes	73%
No	27%

Have you been bullied or subject to harassment at work?

Yes	57%
No	43%

What are the main sources of bullying?

Plant owner or plant workers 52%

How often does bullying happen?

Daily	15%
Weekly	22%
Monthly	10%

Have you or other staff in your area had time off for bullying?

Yes	39%
No	44%

How confident are you that the MHS would deal fairly with a complaint about bullying?

Very	8%
Not very	41%
Not at all	40%



... we share the view of the Farm Animal Welfare Council that there is much wrong with this system ...

TRAINING

Training to be a slaughterman is a four-step process.

First, trainees are issued with a provisional licence, which is free and lasts for three months. Provisional licences state the species, type of equipment and the operations that the holder is licensed for. While working on a provisional licence, a trainee can only work in the presence, and under the direction, of a holder of a full licence covering the same species and type of equipment. Next, a trainee slaughterman is assessed to determine whether or not he has the necessary level of competence, knowledge, skill and understanding of the importance of animal welfare to allow a registered licence to be issued. He must show an understanding of the relevant statutory requirements, including Codes of Practice, and how they work to protect animals. There is no formal exam. Instead, practical skills are observed and this may be in just one session or over a period of time. The cost is £40, but up to five people can be assessed in one go, bringing down the cost to just £8 each.

If deemed appropriate, the trainee will be issued with a certificate of competence by an Official Veterinarian (or OV, previously known as an Official Veterinary Surgeon or OVS).

And finally, he is issued with a permanent licence, costing £20, which is valid for life throughout Great Britain. There is no reassessment ever.

We share the view of the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) that there is much wrong with this system.

In most cases, the certificate of competence is issued by an OVS who may, in some cases, also be responsible for the basic training of that individual. FAWC states: 'There must be some concern that this does not sit comfortably with the OVS's accreditation and enforcement roles. In our view the same OVS should not be the trainer, issuer of a certificate of competence and enforcement officer.'¹¹

While the relevance of a certificate of competence is heavily reliant on the expertise of the individual OVS, there is no requirement on the OVS to have reached any level of competence, either on the operations or on assessment.¹²

In summary, there is no need for training and evaluation to be independently scrutinised, no formal exam, no need for the assessor to have reached any level of competence and no need for re-training or reassessment at any point in the future. All that is needed is to want to be a slaughterman, to be 18 years old and to be able to pay £28. It is a recipe for incompetence and sloppiness.



... the vast majority of workers on the ground do not feel that they are encouraged to report breaches of legislation ...



ENFORCEMENT



A SHEEP WHO LEAPT INTO THE SLAUGHTER ROOM FOR 'REFUGE' IS THROWN BACK TO BE STUNNED

All abattoirs are supervised by Official Veterinarians on site who are employed by the Meat Hygiene Service, a government agency. It is the job of Official Veterinarians to ensure compliance with meat hygiene, animal welfare and other statutory rules. They are guided in these duties by 'detailed instructions' provided by Defra.

According to Defra, 'OVs take action on the spot to correct any problems they may find: this may include verbal or written advice or warnings and, when necessary, a recommendation for prosecution. If OV's see animals arriving at a slaughterhouse which show evidence of welfare problems arising on farm or during transport, they will report the incident to the appropriate enforcement body which will take the necessary follow-up action.'¹³

In reality, the 2008 Meat Hygiene Service survey shows that the vast majority of workers on the ground do not feel that they

are encouraged to report breaches of legislation with a view to initiating enforcement proceedings. And for any serious breaches that are reported, more than half of workers surveyed said they were 'not at all' confident that the Meat Hygiene Service would properly follow them up.

With millions of animals being slaughtered in the UK under such a flawed system, there is little chance that breaches of laws designed to protect animals will ever come to light, let alone be acted upon. Records show that between 1990 and 1996, there was one single prosecution initiated by Defra under animal welfare legislation. That individual was found guilty and fined just £250.¹⁴

'We have the right to recommend somebody for prosecution, maybe the lairage man, maybe the manager, maybe whoever we want... but basically we don't. We talk and that's it because we don't want enemies... It's unthinkable how often people will not do their job properly. Not because they don't know how but they're bored, because they want to take the piss out of you, or... they don't care. End of story. They don't care.' Official Veterinarian, secretly filmed for a 2008 BBC TV 'Week In Week Out' special programme on meat hygiene.



EVIDENCE OF BREACHES

Our film, which covers only a brief timespan, shows several potential breaches of The Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995. Incidents that caused us concern are set out below.

'No person shall cause avoidable excitement, pain or suffering to any animal'

AC Hopkins – partially stunned animals were allowed to come round without immediate re-stunning.

'No person shall lift or drag, or cause or permit to be lifted or dragged, any animal by the head, horns, ears, feet, tail, fleece or any other part of its body in such a way as to cause it unnecessary pain or suffering.'

AC Hopkins – a sheep was dragged into the stun room by his head. JV Richards – sheep were lifted by their fleece and thrown into the stun room.

'No person shall use, or cause or permit to be used, to make any animal move any instrument which administers an electric shock, except that such an instrument which has been designed for the purpose of making an animal move may be used on adult bovine animals and adult pigs which refuse to move, provided that (aa) the use of the instrument is avoided as far as possible

(a) the shocks last no more than one second each, are adequately spaced out and are not used repeatedly if the animal fails to respond

(b) the animal has room ahead of it in which to move

(c) such shocks are applied only to the muscles of the hindquarters.'

AC Hopkins – the electric tongs were used as a goad on the backs, shoulders, necks and ears of pigs to make them move closer to the hoist; and – in one case – to 'punish' a pig for 'getting in the way'.

'No person shall strike, or apply pressure to, any particularly sensitive part of the body of any animal.'

AC Hopkins – electric tongs were applied to the tips of sheep's noses. JV Richards – pigs were kicked in the face to get them to move and – in one case – to punish a pig for 'getting in the way'.

'No person shall inflict any blow or kick to any animal.'

JV Richards – pigs were kicked in the face to get them to move and – in one case – to punish a pig for 'getting in the way'.

'No person shall stun, or cause or permit to be stunned, any animal unless it is possible to

(a) bleed it without delay

(b) kill it without delay.'

AC Hopkins – a group of pigs was left in the stun room for six-and-a-half minutes. JV Richards – groups of pigs were left in the stun room for 13 and 15 minutes, and one group of sheep was left for 20 minutes.

'No person shall use, or cause or permit to be used, electrodes to stun any animal unless

(a) the electrodes are so placed that they span the brain, enabling the current to pass through it

(c) the strength and the duration of the current used is such that the animal is immediately rendered unconscious and remains so until it is dead.'

AC Hopkins – electrodes were used in such a way that they did not span the brain; and the current to some sheep and almost all the pigs was not administered long enough to ensure that they remained unconscious until death. JV Richards – because of inadequate stunning, some sheep and pigs did not remain unconscious until they were killed.

'The occupier of a slaughterhouse and any person engaged in the movement or lairaging of animals shall ensure that no person drags any animal which has been stunned or killed over any other animal which has not been stunned or killed.'

At both AC Hopkins and JV Richards, sheep were stunned and dragged over conscious sheep.

'Any animal which is too young to take solid feed is slaughtered or killed immediately'

AC Hopkins – suckling lambs were not stunned before the ewes.



OPERATOR STANDS ON FELLED PIG TO REACH SHACKLING CHAINS

ANIMAL AID'S RECOMMENDATIONS

- We believe that the abattoirs we chose are typical of those spanning the country and, as such, we would expect standards to be similar countrywide. Because of this and the lack of will to enforce welfare legislation by Defra and its agencies, we join FAWC in calling for CCTV to be installed in all slaughterhouses, and would support its film being made available to a panel that includes a representative from Animal Aid.
- There should be ongoing training for all abattoir workers and the law should be changed so that they are formally re-tested every three years.
- Given the apparent routine and multiple legislative breaches by the AC Hopkins stun operator/slaughterer, and evidence of his disregard for the welfare of animals, we are calling for the immediate revocation of his licence, and his prosecution for animal welfare breaches.
- Additionally, we are calling for an independent investigation into the reasons for what, in our view, is this worker's deficient performance, including an assessment of the role of the AC Hopkins' management, the Meat Hygiene Service and the Official Veterinarians.



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THE HUMANE SLAUGHTER MYTH



An Animal Aid Investigation into UK Slaughterhouses

**Animal Aid exposes and campaigns peacefully against
all animal abuse, and promotes a cruelty-free lifestyle**

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