

LEGISLATION and REGULATION



U.S. Humane Slaughter Regulations

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) published in the Federal Register (30 November 1979) final regulations pursuant to the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act of 1978. The Act technically went into effect on 16 October 1979, but questions about the specific nature of the regulations and their economic impact on the slaughter industry delayed the final implementation.

The Humane Methods of Slaughter Act of 1978 was preceded by the Humane Slaughter Act of 1958, passed by the U.S. Congress in response to intense public concern over livestock abuse in meat packing plants. This earlier legislation encountered heavy opposition from the slaughter industry which resented government intrusion into regulation of slaughter practices. Congress bowed to the opposition and made adherence to humane slaughter standards mandatory only for those slaughterhouses which sold meat to the federal government. The sole penalty for violations was withdrawal of government contracts.

Since 1958, the industry has come to recognize the benefits of

adopting humane slaughter methods. Pre-slaughter stunning of livestock reduces injury to personnel, and humane handling eliminates a significant amount of the bruising and carcass damage which is a major source of financial loss for slaughterhouses. However, problems have remained. There is no record of any enforcement action under the 1958 Act. Although the majority of slaughterhouses has technically adopted the methods specified in the Act, abuse of livestock has continued due to equipment breakdowns or employee misconduct.

Animal welfare organizations have been concerned with the fact that large quantities of meat are imported into the United States from foreign slaughterhouses which have been totally beyond the purview of U.S. law. The additional problem of resistance to legislation from individual states prompted the animal welfare community to seek federal action. Five years after the initial appeal in 1973, Congress enacted a new humane slaughter law which incorporated the 1958 humane slaughter standards into the Federal Meat Inspection Act.

Placing responsibility for regulation under the aegis of USDA meat inspectors had two important implications. First, all slaughterhouses covered by the Federal Meat Inspection Act are also covered under the new law and regulations. Foreign slaughterhouses exporting meat to the United States, all U.S. slaughterhouses in states which have federal meat inspection only, and any slaughterhouse engaged in interstate commerce are automatically included. Slaughterhouses confined to intrastate activity and states which maintain separate meat inspection systems have 18 months to comply with the new provisions. This period may be extended if new state legislation or regulations must be developed to meet federal standards.

Second, the penalty structure contained in the Federal Meat Inspection Act now applies to violations of humane slaughter regulations. The Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to suspend inspection at a slaughterhouse until the plant corrects violations. Slaughter operations must cease during the interim to comply with the Federal Meat Inspection Act's ban on selling uninspected meat. Inspection can be permanently withdrawn only after a legal hearing.

The new law also broadens the definition of "pre-slaughter handling of livestock" to include treatment of animals from off-loading at the slaughterhouse premises to the moment of slaughter. Formerly, "pre-slaughter handling" referred exclusively to stunning practices. The final regulations prohibit the excessive use of electric prods, canvas slappers and other implements, as well as any use of pipes, sticks and other pointed objects which could cause injury or unnecessary pain to the livestock. This section of the regulations also requires that pens, drive alleys and ramps be maintained in good repair, and that floors be constructed and maintained to provide secure footing for the animals. Inhumane treatment of disabled animals (e.g. dragging) constitutes a violation. Animals must be watered in all holding pens and, if held longer than 24 hours, they must have access to feed and adequate room for resting overnight.

The Federal Meat Inspection Act does not protect all species of food animals. The USDA has exempted chickens, American bison, reindeer and catalo from its humane handling and slaughter provisions. The species to be regulated include cattle, sheep, swine, goats, horses, mules and other equines.

USDA officials do not believe that these new regulations will add to agency costs since federal inspectors are already on the premises of slaughter plants. Some slaughterhouses,

however, face the considerable expense of installing new equipment to meet federal requirements.

Controversy continues over several of the stunning methods listed as acceptable under the government regulations. Carbon dioxide stunning of pigs has been criticized on the grounds that the animals tend to become excited (and therefore more difficult to anesthetize) as they are conveyed to the carbon dioxide chamber. Electrical stunning may also need further research to determine the proper placement of electrodes and the amount of voltage sufficient to cause unconsciousness.

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HSUS Legislative Associate

Ohio Bill on Euthanasia

Representative Edith Mayer (R. Cincinnati) has introduced a bill into the Ohio legislature which would prohibit the use of any high altitude decompression chambers to euthanize dogs or cats. The decompression chamber works by removing air from an enclosed space with a vacuum pump, simulating a rapid ascent to an altitude of 55,000 feet. The low air pressure produces hypoxia, which results in unconsciousness and finally, death.

According to a report compiled by The Humane Society of the United States' Department of Animal Sheltering and Control (*Report on HB 584, 1979*), euthanasia by decompression is neither practical nor humane. Animals may experience severe physiological damage prior to losing consciousness during the decompression-recompression cycle. Damage can occur when infection of the upper respiratory tract (often the reason for destroying the animal) prevents pressure equalization in the middle ear. Abdominal pain may also arise from the expansion of trapped gases in the intestinal tract.

Another problem cited in the report concerns the age of animals at the time of euthanasia. A substantial number of the animals euthanized at shelters and pounds are kittens and puppies. Young animals, with their greater tolerance for oxygen deprivation, have been known to survive the entire procedure and emerge with internal injuries. The limited space capacity of the chamber as well as the inevitable troubles which occur with any mechanical device present additional practical disadvantages.

Eight states (Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts and Virginia) have banned decompression chambers and the affected shelters are now using methods such as sodium pentobarbital injection or filtered carbon monoxide poisoning. The use of barbiturates, in particular, compares favorably in cost to the high altitude decompression chamber, requires no mechanical maintenance and is effective regardless of the animal's age or physical condition.

The Ohio Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA) has not taken an official stand on the bill. However, OVMA Executive Secretary Gene King said that the association has "periodically reaffirmed" its agreement with the American Veterinary Medical Association's guidelines on euthanasia. The latest report of the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia states that although rapid decompression is a satisfactory procedure for euthanasia under ideal conditions, "...Because many difficulties have arisen in using decompression and because there is a general lack of understanding of how hypoxia affects animals, other methods of euthanasia are preferable" (*JAVMA* 173:59-72, 1978).

Hearings on the bill began in January 1980.

MEETINGS and ANNOUNCEMENTS



FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

British Small Animal Veterinary Association: 1980 Congress, April 11-13, 1980, Cunard International Hotel, London. Contact BSAVA Registration Office, 5 St. George's Terrace, Cheltenham, Glos. GL50 3PT, UK.

Cetacean Behavior, Intelligence and the Ethics of Killing Cetaceans Week of April 28, 1980, Washington, D.C. By invitation. Contact Dr. Ray Gambell, International Whaling Commission, The Red House, Station Road, Histon, Cambridge, CB4 4NP, UK Telegram: INTERWHALE CAMBRIDGE.

American Society of Primatologists: Third Annual Meeting, June 3-5, 1980, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Contact Dr. David M. Taub, Dept. of Comparative Medicine, Bowman Gray School of Medicine, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, NC 27103 for local registration, and Dr. Douglas M. Bowden, Regional Primate Research Center SJ-50, University of Washing-

ton, Seattle, WA 98195 for enquiries on program content.

Ninth International Congress on Animal Reproduction and Artificial Insemination: June 16-20, 1980, Madrid, Spain. Contact Dr. Tomas Perez Garcia, INIA, Crida 06, Departamento de Reproduccion Animal, Avda. de Puerta de Hierro s/n, Madrid-3, Spain.

International Society of Animal Hygiene: Third International Congress of Animal Hygiene, September 10-12, 1980, Vienna, Austria. Contact Secretariat, Third International Congress of Animal Hygiene, c/o INTERCONVENTION, P.O. Box 35, A-1095 Vienna, Austria.

Israel Association for Buiatrics: Eleventh International Congress on Diseases of Cattle, October 20-23, 1980, Tel Aviv, Israel. Contact Dr. E. Mayer, Congress Secretariat, P.O. Box 9610, Haifa, Israel.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ACLAM Honors Harry Rowsell

Dr. Harry C. Rowsell, Executive Director of the Canadian Council on Animal Care, has become the first foreign veterinarian to receive honorary membership in the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine (ACLAM). Dr. Rowsell accepted the award at the 1979 Annual Meeting of the American Veterinary Medical Association in Seattle, Washington. He addressed some of his remarks at the presentation to the unique position held by the veterinarian in laboratory animal medicine: "The veterinarian in this field must stride with head erect, and be willing to take firm stands on the ethics of animal use, for there is no other scientist or individual who can do it with more assurance, based on scientific knowledge of the need for humane treatment of animals."

Animal Rights Network

Animal Rights Network, Inc. (ARN) is a new organization "dedicated to raising consciousness about our place in the network of life, [going] to the roots of all types of animal exploitation (not just one species or problem), and [harnessing] the efforts of caring people and groups all over the world..." (*Animal Rights Network News*, November 1979, p.1). A primary goal of ARN is the unification and expansion of the animal rights/animal welfare movements, through mass education via the media, to a point where they occupy a major place in public awareness.

Dr. Peter Singer, author of *Animal Liberation*, has been named honorary chairman of the group. For further information, contact Mr. Jim Mason, Animal Rights Network, Inc., P.O. Box 5234, Westport, CT., USA.



FILM REVIEW

The first American screening of the film **QUANTUM PHARMACOLOGY** took place in New York on January 19, 1980. The sponsors of the film (The National Antivivisection Society [UK] and the Dutch Society Against Vivisection) hope that it will demonstrate what can be achieved in biomedical research without the use of animals.