RSPCA

FEBRUARY 2026

RSPCA welfare standards

# Hatcheries

## Chicks, poults and ducklings

# Contents

# Introduction

The *RSPCA welfare standards for hatcheries* take account of UK legislation, government welfare codes, scientific research, veterinary advice, recommendations of the Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) and the practical experience of the farming industry.

The standards are based upon the 'Five Freedoms' as defined by FAWC (now known as AWC). Although these 'freedoms' define ideal states, they provide a comprehensive framework for the assessment of animal welfare on farm, in transit and at the place of slaughter, as well as representing an important element of farm assurance requirements.

- **Freedom from hunger and thirst** by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- **Freedom from discomfort** by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- **Freedom from pain, injury or disease** by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- **Freedom to express normal behaviour** by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
- **Freedom from fear and distress** by ensuring conditions and care which avoid mental suffering.

These freedoms will be better provided for if those who have care of livestock practise/provide:

- **caring and responsible planning and management**
- **skilled, knowledgeable and conscientious stockmanship**
- **appropriate environmental design**
- **considerate handling and transport**
- **humane slaughter.**

## Guide to the use of the RSPCA welfare standards

- The numbered requirements are the standards, all of which must be complied with.
- Boxed sections (indicated by ⓘ) give additional information, including: providing the reasoning behind a standard, expand on a standard, state how a standard can/will be assessed and/or highlight areas where the standards will be reviewed in the future.
- It is expected that all relevant UK legislation regarding farm animal husbandry and welfare on-farm, during transport, and at the slaughter facility, will be fully implemented in addition to the RSPCA welfare standards.
- Some standards have been labelled as shown below, which have the following meaning:

  **LEGAL** refers to a standard that is based on an England legal requirement.

  **REVISED** refers to a standard or information box that was in the previous edition of these standards but has been amended.

  **NEW** refers to a completely new standard or information box, which must now be adhered to.
- **Farmers are required by law to have a thorough knowledge of the Defra *Code of Recommendations for the appropriate poultry species.***

## RSPCA Farm Animals Department

The RSPCA's Farm Animals Department develops the RSPCA welfare standards for farm animals. These detailed documents are intended to represent 'best practice' in the care and welfare of farm animals.

The RSPCA works to continually develop and improve the welfare standards using a range of information, including the latest scientific research and practical farming experience. We regularly consult with other animal welfare and agricultural scientists, veterinary surgeons, and farming industry representatives. This helps to ensure that the RSPCA welfare standards continue to be at the forefront of farm animal care and welfare, and are also achievable on commercial farms.

We always value constructive feedback and ideas for improvement from those who are implementing the RSPCA welfare standards. Comments/feedback can be discussed with RSPCA Farm Animals Department scientific staff, by contacting them on the below details:

Address: Farm Animals Department
RSPCA
4th Floor Parkside
Chart Way
Horsham
West Sussex RH12 1GY

Email: farm-animals@rspca.org.uk

The RSPCA does not approve equipment, but sets standards to ensure any equipment permitted for use is managed appropriately to safeguard the welfare of animals.

# Management

**M 1.1** All records and other documentation that the *RSPCA welfare standards for hatcheries* require to be kept and maintained, must be made available on request.

**M 1.2** Where changes are being made to existing equipment that may affect bird welfare, or new equipment is being installed that has not previously been assessed, managers must inform the certification scheme that is responsible for assessing against these standards, beforehand.

**M 1.3** All hatchery staff must:

a) have access to a copy of the current version of the *RSPCA welfare standards for hatcheries*

b) be familiar with its content

c) understand and apply its content in the area relevant to their duties.

**M 1.4** At least every 6 months, managers must review procedures relating to the following:

a) biosecurity

b) hatchery hygiene management

c) bird welfare

d) personnel training.

**M 1.4.1** All hatcheries must receive annual input from the attending veterinary surgeon, or other suitably qualified person, to review the procedures listed in standard M 1.4.

**M 1.5** Managers must develop and implement a biosecurity plan to minimise the risk of disease introduction and spread of disease.

**M 1.6** Managers must be able to demonstrate effective biosecurity measures for all personnel entering the premises.

**M 1.7** A visitor's book must be kept up to date, including records of the previous premises visited where poultry were present.

**M 1.8** **REVISED** Managers must:

a) develop and implement contingency plans and preventative measures for the following emergency situations, to help ensure the welfare of the birds can be safeguarded at all times:

   i. fire

   ii. freezing conditions

   iii. storm damage

   iv. flood

   v. breakdown of environmental control systems

   vi. interruption of supplies to the hatchery, e.g. gas supply for bird culling/killing or electricity

   vii. notifiable disease outbreaks

b) provide an emergency action board sited in a prominent position that is visible to all staff and emergency services, which must include:

   i. the procedures to be followed by those discovering an emergency

   ii. the location of water sources for use by the fire services

   iii. the what3words address and postcode for location of the hatchery.

**NEW** **A contingency plan is a course of action designed to help a business respond effectively to a significant future possible event/situation.**

**For each event/situation, the plan includes the potential impacts on the animals and the actions that can be taken to address the issues identified. For example, in the event of a breakdown or transport issue that results in birds having to remain in the hatchery for longer than planned, contingency plans will detail:**

- **the potential issues caused by this event and the implications to the welfare of the birds**
- **the actions that can be taken to safeguard the birds' welfare.**

**M 1.9** All surfaces and equipment within the hatchery must be:

a) maintained in good condition

b) cleaned regularly.

**M 1.10** **REVISED** Managers must:

a) ensure that staff are trained and competent to carry out their duties prior to:

   i. handling eggs and/or birds

   ii. undertaking bird culling/killing

b) record any training undertaken by staff

c) continually monitor the competence of staff employed to handle the eggs and birds.

**M 1.10.1** **NEW** Training related to standard M 1.10 must be validated (see information box below).

**NEW** **Acceptable validated forms of training include that offered by a recognised training provider or a formal in-house training programme.**

**It is strongly recommended that hatchery staff attend a course recognised by the Lion Training Passport or British Poultry Training – through the Poultry Passport scheme – as this is the formal route for industry training and training recognition. This may become mandatory in the next standard review.**

**M 1.11** Relevant staff must receive appropriate training to enable them to maintain all hatchery equipment in full working order.

**M 1.12** **REVISED** Managers must appoint a named Bird Welfare Officer (BWO) who is responsible for the welfare of all birds during the process of:

a) handling

b) sorting

c) culling/killing.

**M 1.13** REVISED The BWO (see standard M 1.12) must carry out daily checks on all personnel who come into contact with the birds during the process of:

a) incubation

b) sorting

c) culling/killing.

**M 1.14** LEGAL Managers must maintain records of production data, which must include documentation on:

a) place of origin of eggs entering the hatchery

b) health of breeding flock

c) movement of birds leaving hatchery

d) vaccinations given to birds

e) number of birds hatched each week

f) overall hatchability

g) the daily mortality (where the cause of death can be identified, this must be stated)

h) the number of birds culled per day (including reason for culling).

**M 1.15** Managers must develop and implement a transport plan which:

a) minimises the time birds spend in transit from the hatchery to the rearing unit

b) ensures that birds are transferred safely and with care.

**M 1.16** Managers must:

a) have access to a copy of the *Code of practice for the prevention and control of salmonella in breeding flocks and hatcheries* (Defra, PB 1564, 1993)

b) be familiar with its content

c) implement the recommendations as appropriate.

## Protection from other animals

**M 2.1** NEW A written Wild Animal Control Plan (WACP) must be:

a) in place, and

b) implemented.

**M 2.2** NEW Levels of potentially harmful wild animals (e.g. rodents and birds) must be managed humanely to avoid:

a) the risk of disease spread to birds

b) damage to buildings and the services on which birds depend.

NEW **In England and Wales, the following legislation applies to the management of wildlife:**

- **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**
- **Animal Welfare Act 2006**
- **The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010**
- **Protection of Badgers Act 1992**
- **Pests Act 1954**
- **The Spring Traps Approval (England) Order 2012**
- **The Spring Traps Approval (Wales) Order 2012**
- **The Small Ground Vermin Traps Order 1958**
- **Food and Environment Protection Act 1985**
- **The Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986**
- **Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act 1962**

**Equivalent legislation applies in Scotland and Northern Ireland.**

**M 2.3** NEW The primary means of protecting birds from wild animals, as documented in the WACP, must be by:

a) physical exclusion methods

b) the removal of elements in the vicinity that might encourage the presence of wild animals

c) maintaining buildings in a clean and tidy condition to minimise the risk of wild animals gaining access.

NEW **Physical exclusion measures are the most humane and effective methods of providing protection from wild animals.**

**Measures should only be applied after the area has been checked and cleared of elements that could encourage the presence of wild animals, as applying some measures can interfere with rodent behaviour and encourage them to spread to other areas. Humane methods include:**

- **construction/maintenance of fencing appropriate for excluding the wild animals in question**
- **removal of shelter/cover (e.g. weeds, heaps of rubble, broken equipment etc.) in the area surrounding buildings**
- **removal/protection of obvious food sources**
- **maintenance of drains**
- **maintenance/proofing of buildings against wild animals**

**Some of the methods listed above are intended to remove unnecessary and unintended harbourage sites, as opposed to elements specifically provided for other purposes.**

**M 2.4** NEW Where any method of lethal control is being considered, a site survey must be carried out before applying the control, i.e. bait or traps, identifying:

a) the type, level and extent of the problem species

b) any maintenance and proofing issues.

**M 2.5** NEW Where any lethal method of control is used, its use must have taken into account the results of the site survey (see standard M 2.4).

**M 2.6** NEW The WACP must include provisions that specifically exclude the following methods of control:

a) snaring

b) gassing

c) vertebrate glue traps.

**M 2.7** NEW Long-term baiting must not be used as a routine rodent control measure.

ⓘ **NEW In relation to standard M 2.7, site plans should therefore highlight potential high risk areas for wild animal activity (rather than permanent baiting locations).**

ⓘ **NEW The RSPCA is opposed to the use of poisons that cause animal suffering and it is important not to rely solely on the use of rodenticide. The RSPCA is concerned about the welfare of all animals that have the capacity to suffer, and therefore all alternative forms of deterrent and humane control should be exhausted before resorting to the use of poisons for rodents.**

ⓘ **NEW Any baiting programme should be considered carefully and justified in risk assessments for each location where used. Consideration should be given to using non-toxic baits in order to ascertain the presence of rodents, which may necessitate the use of rodenticide.**

**M 2.8** NEW When bait and/or traps are used, records of their use must be kept and:

a) state the location of the bait/traps

b) state what bait/traps were used

c) state the volume/number of bait/traps placed

d) state the name of the person who placed the bait/trap

e) be retained for at least two years.

**M 2.9** NEW Bait and traps must:

a) be placed in suitable positions

b) be sufficiently protected to avoid harming non-target animals.

**M 2.10** NEW Bait must be used according to the manufacturer's instruction for:

a) storage

b) usage, including areas of use and replenishment

c) disposal.

**M 2.11** NEW Traps must be:

a) used according to the manufacturer's guidelines

b) maintained in good order

c) disposed of appropriately if no longer fit for purpose, e.g. have broken

d) stored safely and securely.

**M 2.12** NEW Bait points must:

a) be monitored regularly, and

b) records or monitoring must be kept, including:

i. levels of any activity at each bait point

ii. any missing or disturbed bait

iii. the name of the person responsible for monitoring the bait points.

**M 2.13** NEW Trap points must:

a) be monitored at least twice a day, ideally at dawn and dusk, and

b) records of monitoring must be kept, including:

i. levels of activity at each trap

ii. any missing or disturbed traps

iii. the name of the person responsible for monitoring traps.

**M 2.14** NEW Any injured, sick or dying wild animals found – that have been targeted for control – must be humanely dispatched immediately to prevent further suffering.

ⓘ **NEW Regular replenishment of bait will help to prevent sub-lethal doses, which can result in a build-up of resistance to the active ingredient.**

**M 2.15** NEW Where bait is used, dead animals must be disposed of safely, in line with the manufacturer's product label.

ⓘ **NEW Safe disposal of wild animals that have died as a result of poisoning reduces the risk of secondary poisoning in non-target species, such as domestic and other wild animals (including birds), that may consume the carcasses.**

**M 2.16** NEW Once treatment is complete, all traps and traces of bait must be:

a) removed

b) disposed of/stored according to the manufacturer's instructions.

**M 2.17** NEW Wild animal control methods must be covered by a COSHH assessment, where required.

**M 2.18** NEW Managers must ensure that all stock-keepers:

a) have access to a copy of the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use *UK Code of Best Practice: Best Practice and Guidance for Rodent Control and the Safe Use of Rodenticides*

b) are familiar with its content

c) understand and apply its content.

**NEW Managers are strongly encouraged to complete at least one of the free, self-study training courses on rodent control, available at: https://www.thinkwildlife.org/training-certification/ . The courses are approved by the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU).**

**Further information and access to the CRRU Code of Best Practice is available on the AHDB website, here: https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/rodent-control-on-farms**

## Artificial intelligence

**NEW The RSPCA is reviewing the role of artificial intelligence and the wide-ranging benefits it can bring to improving farm animal welfare, particularly in the areas of monitoring behaviour and welfare assessment. Where relevant, it is strongly recommended that managers investigate the feasibility of such technology to further safeguard animal welfare. Where such technology is being considered, please contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.**

# Handling and storage of eggs

**HSE 1.1** Measures must be taken to:

a) minimise the risk of disease entry into the hatchery

b) avoid cross-contamination.

**HSE 1.2** Eggs that have arrived from laying units must never come into contact with newly-hatched birds or hatch debris.

**Separate areas for the handling of each of these are essential to avoid disease transfer.**

**HSE 1.3** Eggs must be thoroughly sanitised, using processes such as fumigation, before being placed in the setter.

**HSE 1.4** Dirty eggs must not be incubated.

**HSE 1.5** There must be communication and a planning procedure between the breeding flock manager and hatchery to ensure that there is an adequate supply of eggs, to reduce the need for eggs to be stored for prolonged periods.

**HSE 1.6** Eggs must not be stored for longer than 14 days.

REVISED **Under normal circumstances, the RSPCA recommends that eggs should not be stored for longer than seven days. Research and practical experience has demonstrated a decrease in hatchability and an increase in post-hatch mortality when eggs are stored for longer than 14 days.**

**The RSPCA is aware of a technique which uses short periods of incubation during egg storage (SPIDES) to improve the hatchability of eggs stored over 14 days. The RSPCA is currently investigating the effect of this practice on hatchability and chick viability, and will consider the need for more guidance and/or standards on this issue in the future.**

**HSE 1.7** Measures must be taken to reduce the possibility of microbial contamination of eggs and trolleys/trays.

**HSE 1.8** Trolleys and trays must be cleaned and disinfected regularly using products approved by Defra.

**HSE 1.9** Manual handling of eggs must be kept to a minimum.

# Hatching

**HCH 1.1** The temperature and humidity within the setters must be accurately monitored.

**HCH 1.1.1** The temperature and humidity within the hatchers must be accurately monitored.

**HCH 1.2** The ventilation system must be checked and monitored to ensure that a fresh supply of oxygen is available.

**HCH 1.3** Records must be kept of checks made to ensure that the eggs placed in setters are being turned frequently to allow bird embryos to develop properly.

**HCH 1.4** Operators must check the eggs in accordance with standard HCH 1.3 at least 3 times each day.

**HCH 1.5** Alarm systems must be fitted to monitor any fluctuations in temperature and humidity during the incubation period that could reduce the hatchability of fully developed birds.

**HCH 1.6** There must be:

a) an effective means of communication to alert relevant personnel in the event of equipment failure

b) an appropriate contingency plan to minimise any disturbance during the incubation period.

**HCH 1.7** When eggs are transferred from the setters to the hatchers, care must be taken to avoid any unnecessary movement and disturbance.

**HCH 1.8** Sanitation must be conducted in accordance with the:

a) hatching equipment manufacturer's guidelines (in particular to calculate bird exposure time with regards to the volume and ventilation rate of the equipment)

b) sanitiser manufacturer's guidelines (in particular to calculate sanitiser concentration).

**HCH 1.9** When using a noxious substance, such as Formalin, sanitation must be:

a) performed only once in the hatcher

b) conducted when the majority of the birds are 'pipping' and not at peak emergence.

**Formalin is a noxious substance and can cause irritation to the birds' eyes and nasal passages, especially if used incorrectly. Consideration should be given to the use of alternative sanitisers, which are as effective but less noxious.**

**NEW The RSPCA is aware of new technology that delivers formalin over a prolonged period of time (days), which is reported to enable a reduction in the dose per chick.**

**The RSPCA is currently investigating this method further with a view to producing more guidance and/or standards on this in the future.**

**Hatcheries looking to adopt such technology should contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department to discuss this, prior to the installation of equipment.**

**HCH 1.10** Birds must not be removed from the hatcher before they are sufficiently dry to enable them to maintain body temperature.

**HCH 1.11** All trays containing newly hatched birds must be examined immediately when removed from the hatchers and birds must be separated from the remains of the egg shells.

**HCH 1.12** REVISED Prior to the installation of automatic separating equipment, hatcheries must contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department to:

a) discuss the design of such equipment

b) obtain written permission for the use of such equipment.

**HCH 1.13** Where automatic sorters are used, the following conditions must be satisfied:

a) the tipping of birds from the hatcher trays must be gradual and ensure that birds are delivered directly onto the sorting equipment

b) birds must be protected from falling from the sides of the sorter or falling into the debris

c) empty hatcher trays must be examined thoroughly for any remaining birds or unhatched eggs prior to washing.

**HCH 1.14** LEGAL Any birds that are deformed, sick or injured, or which have not hatched successfully, must be removed without delay and humanely culled (see Culling/killing section).

**NEW The RSPCA strongly recommends that birds should be provided with both food and water (e.g. as a gel block) as soon as possible after hatching.**

**The RSPCA is currently reviewing the practicalities associated with providing food and water in a hatchery setting, with a view to making their provision a requirement in the future.**

# Handling

**HND 1.1** Hatcheries considering new automatic handling equipment to facilitate the sorting process of birds at different stages, such as feather sexing, must contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department to obtain written permission for the use of the equipment prior to installation.

**NEW** **Advances in technology have resulted in the development of a number of methods of in-ovo sexing. The RSPCA is currently investigating these methods further with a view to producing more guidance and/or standards on this issue in the future.**

**Hatcheries looking to adopt any new technology relating to in-ovo sexing should contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department to discuss this, prior to the installation of such equipment.**

**HND 1.2** The BWO (see standard M 1.12) must carry out an assessment of all equipment in operation to identify any potential welfare risks to birds during the handling process.

**HND 1.3** **REVISED** Birds must be handled carefully and in a compassionate manner at all times.

**HND 1.4** Care must be taken to ensure that birds are not injured during the handling process.

**The handling process starts when chicks leave the hatcher and ends when the chicks have been loaded for transport. It involves both mechanical and manual handling, including the sorting and sexing of the chicks.**

**HND 1.5** Manual handling of birds must be kept to a minimum at all times.

**HND 1.6** Where birds are manually transferred from one area to another in trays, care must be taken when lifting and placing the trays to avoid causing unnecessary movement of, and disturbance to, the birds.

**HND 1.7** **REVISED** Where automatic conveyor belt systems are used these must:

a) be designed to ensure that birds cannot become trapped

b) provide adequate side protection to contain the birds

c) not be overcrowded, in order to prevent distress or suffocation.

**HND 1.8** Where necessary, additional side protection must be fitted to the conveyor belt system to ensure the wellbeing of the birds.

**HND 1.9** **REVISED** The design and speed of the automatic conveyor belt system must:

a) not cause injuries to the birds

b) avoid unnecessary sudden changes in speed or direction so the birds can:

   i. maintain an upright posture

   ii. regain an upright posture without delay, where a sudden change in speed or direction is unavoidable (see information box below).

NEW **There may be occasions where it is not possible for birds to maintain an upright posture (i.e. sit or stand upright), such as during the shell separation process and automated chick counting.**

**HND 1.10** Where birds are transferred between different levels, the angle of the conveyor belt must not cause the birds to lose balance.

**The RSPCA commissioned research to investigate potential welfare issues that may arise during the handling process at hatcheries. Bird behaviour can be used to indicate whether the design of equipment and systems is appropriate – for example, loss of posture and disorientation. Signs of injury, bleeding or bruising of birds, and also 7-day mortality following placement at the farm, are all useful welfare measures, which can all be influenced by factors such as the number and height of drops between adjacent conveyors and the speed of the conveyor belts. Given the velocities and accelerations within handling systems, there is scope for considerable damage to the birds, and for poor welfare, if systems are not properly set up and maintained.**

**HND 1.11** The positioning of the conveyors must ensure all drops between adjoining conveyors are as short as possible.

# Beak trimming of laying hen chicks and turkey poults

REVISED **Beak trimming is against the principles of the RSPCA welfare standards. However, it is acknowledged that, at the current time, prohibiting Infrared Beak Trimming (IRBT) could result in a negative impact on welfare in some laying hen and turkey flocks.**

**The RSPCA plans to phase out IRBT of laying hens within the next five years. The RSPCA will be reviewing practical experience with intact beak birds and welfare outcome assessment data, including feather cover scores, to help inform the inclusion of an appropriate date from which IRBT will be prohibited.**

**In the meantime, where it is deemed necessary to minimise the risk of injurious pecking and cannibalism, IRBT is the only permitted method. IRBT is the only legally permitted method for day-old laying hen chicks, except in emergency situations for older birds (Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2010).**

**Infrared technology has been shown to offer higher standards of welfare compared with conventional methods by improving the accuracy and reducing the risk of pain associated with the process.**

**Further information can be found in the following RSPCA welfare standards: laying hens; pullets; and, turkeys.**

**BT 1.1** LEGAL Beak trimming must only be carried out:

a) on laying hen chicks and turkey poults

b) before 24 hours post-hatching

c) using infrared trimming equipment.

**BT 1.2** The BWO (see standard M 1.12) or other named supervisor must:

a) ensure and record that the infrared equipment is set up appropriately

b) record the names of all operators of the infrared equipment

c) ensure and record appropriate training of all operators

d) ensure all operators are competent.

**BT 1.3** Birds must be handled in a careful and compassionate manner at all times to ensure they are not injured and to minimise the risk of discomfort and distress.

**BT 1.4** Unfit birds must not be placed on the carousel, but humanely culled/killed (see Culling/killing section) within a maximum of 15 minutes (see also standard CK 1.4).

**BT 1.5** The appropriate size mask must be used to trim only the minimum amount of beak, and never more than one third.

**BT 1.6** Birds must not be suspended on the carousel for more than:

a) 20 seconds in the case of laying hen chicks

b) 13 seconds in the case of turkey poults.

**BT 1.7** The release of birds from the carousel must:

a) not cause injury

b) allow the birds to achieve a normal upright position immediately

c) in relation to a) and b), be regularly inspected throughout the process (see standard BT 1.8).

**The tray or conveyor belt should be positioned as close as possible to the site of release to minimise the drop height, and where a chute is used this should be designed to prevent birds from falling out and should not be too steep.**

**BT 1.8** Following release from the carousel, in the event that any birds are found to be injured or not recovering and righting themselves during inspection (see standard BT 1.7 c)):

a) they must be examined, and if necessary, humanely culled immediately

b) no more birds must be placed on to the carousel until the problem is rectified

c) details of the problem along with the remedial action taken must be recorded.

**BT 1.9** If the equipment is stopped for any reason during operation:

a) all birds must be removed from the carousel without delay

b) birds that have been suspended for the longest time must be removed first.

**BT 1.10** The effectiveness of the infrared trimming, in terms of ensuring bird welfare and checking that the correct amount of beak is being treated, must be monitored every hour and recorded.

# Vaccination

**V 1.1** All vaccines must be stored in an appropriate container.

**V 1.2** REVISED There must be an adequate supply of vaccines for the number of eggs and/or birds being hatched each day.

**V 1.2.1** NEW Records relating to standard V 1.2 must be kept.

**V 1.3** Vaccines must be used according to the manufacturer's recommendations and/or as directed by the veterinary surgeon.

**V 1.4** Vaccines that have reached their expiry date must not be used.

**V 1.5** Where live vaccines are used, these must only be prepared immediately before use, to minimise the risk of reduced effectiveness.

**V 1.6** Records of vaccination batch numbers must be kept.

**V 1.7** REVISED All vaccination procedures must be carried out with care and, where injection is required, care must be taken not to cause any unnecessary damage to the eggs and/or birds.

**V 1.8** Records must be kept and updated on a daily basis of those responsible for administering vaccination procedures.

**V 1.9** There must be a named person, responsible for the maintenance of all automatic injection equipment.

**V 1.10** All personnel responsible for administering vaccinations by injection must have received appropriate guidance on suitable handling techniques of the birds by an appointed, named supervisor.

**V 1.11** Equipment used in the administration of vaccines must be maintained and managed in a hygienic manner, in line with the manufacturer's recommendations and/or as directed by the veterinary surgeon.

# Culling/killing

**CK 1.1** REVISED Birds awaiting culling/killing must be:

a) treated humanely

b) protected from:

i. draughts

ii. extremes of temperature.

**CK 1.1.1** No bird must be left for longer than 15 minutes before being culled/killed, from the time of removal from the hatcher.

**CK 1.1.2** NEW Where surplus birds are produced, the hatchery must have a written plan in place to demonstrate the steps taken to minimise, and ultimately prevent, the killing of healthy, viable birds.

**CK 1.1.3** NEW Live birds, no matter how unviable, must be separated from hatchery waste (e.g. shells, in shell embryos) prior to culling/killing.

**CK 1.1.4** NEW A documented procedure for the culling/killing methods used must:

a) be in place

b) be followed at all times

c) include detail on:

i. the correct set-up of the equipment

ii. the effective and safe operation of the equipment

iii. the regular maintenance and cleaning regime in use

iv. contingency plans in the event of an emergency or equipment failure, to help ensure the welfare of the birds can be safeguarded at all times.

**NEW A contingency plan is a course of action designed to help a business respond effectively to a significant future possible event/situation.**

**For each event/situation, the plan includes the potential impacts on the animals and the actions that can be taken to address the issues identified. In the event of a breakdown of the culling/killing equipment, contingency plans will detail:**

- **the potential issues caused by this event and the implications to the welfare of the birds**
- **the actions that can be taken to safeguard the birds' welfare.**

**CK 1.1.5** NEW It is the responsibility of the BWO (see standard M 1.2) to ensure that the documented procedure in standard CK 1.1.4 is followed at all times.

**CK 1.2** REVISED LEGAL Permitted methods of culling/killing are:

a) instantaneous mechanical destruction (maceration)

b) exposure to a maximum of 1% oxygen by volume and a minimum of 95% argon (or other inert gas) by volume in atmospheric air

c) exposure to a maximum of 25% carbon dioxide by volume and a minimum of 60% argon (or other inert gas) by volume in atmospheric air, with no more than 1% residual oxygen.

**NEW When using gas, the Humane Slaughter Association recommends* a maximum of 1% oxygen by volume and a minimum of 95% argon by volume in atmospheric air, as the preferred method, as it induces unconsciousness by anoxia without causing the respiratory discomfort seen when using high concentrations of carbon dioxide.**

**The RSPCA is considering phasing out the use of carbon dioxide gas mixtures for the culling/killing of chicks in the future. Any hatchery considering the installation of gas culling/killing systems should contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department for further guidance.**

*Humane Slaughter Association *Code of Practice for the Killing of Chicks in Hatcheries* 4th Edition, January 2023.

**CK 1.3** The use of 100% carbon dioxide gas is not permitted as a method of disposing of birds.

**CK 1.4** REVISED When a bird should be culled/killed immediately, e.g. where suffering would be prolonged if left until disposed of by the normal method, it must be:

a) LEGAL killed by dislocation of the neck using a procedure that ensures severance of all the major blood vessels and spinal cord and then

b) placed immediately in an instantaneous mechanical destruction device.

**NEW LEGAL EU Regulation No 1099/2009 requires that no person shall kill by manual cervical dislocation more than 70 animals per day.**

**CK 1.5** The culling/killing of birds must only be carried out by a person that is:

a) trained

b) competent.

**CK 1.5.1** NEW All those involved in the culling/killing of birds must:

a) have access to the latest version of the Humane Slaughter Association's *Code of Practice for the Killing of Chicks in Hatcheries*

b) be familiar with its content

c) understand and apply its content (see information box below).

**NEW With reference to standard CK 1.5.1 c), the Humane Slaughter Association's document should complement and support these *RSPCA welfare standards for hatcheries*. However, if there is a conflict between the HSA guidance and what is required under these RSPCA standards, the requirements set out in these standards are to be followed.**

**CK 1.6** REVISED The BWO (see standard M 1.2) must:

a) inspect all equipment used in the culling/killing of birds daily to ensure it is working effectively at all times

b) keep a record of the outcome and any action taken.

**CK 1.6.1** NEW In the case of a system failure, including a gas supply issue:

a) there must be a permitted back-up culling/killing method available and ready for use at all times that is capable of dealing with all birds awaiting culling/killing

b) where the permitted back-up method is used, the following must be recorded:

i. the date and time of the failure

ii. the reason/s for the failure

iii. the time taken to evacuate the birds from the system (where applicable)

iv. the time the failure was rectified and the normal method of culling/killing resumed.

**CK 1.6.2** NEW In the case of gas culling/killing, the back-up method referred to in standard CK 1.6.1 a) must be an instantaneous mechanical destruction device (e.g. macerator).

## Gas culling/killing

**CK 2.1** REVISED The gas concentration must be controlled and monitored accurately, at bird level, using correctly calibrated and appropriate gas monitoring equipment.

**CK 2.1.1** NEW Gas monitoring equipment must be:

a) calibrated regularly according to the manufacturer's instructions, and

b) records of calibration kept.

**CK 2.1.2** NEW Gas concentration levels must be recorded at least twice a day, but preferably continuously.

**CK 2.2** REVISED Birds must be placed into the gas container only once the correct gas mix/concentration has been achieved.

**CK 2.2.1** NEW There must be a visual or auditory alarm system to alert the operative if:

a) the residual volume of oxygen exceeds 1%, and/or

b) the concentration of carbon dioxide exceeds 25%.

**CK 2.2.2** NEW The gas monitoring and alarm system must be easily observable by the operative at all times.

**CK 2.2.3** NEW Birds must enter the gas in a single layer within the tray/on the conveyor floor and not on top of one another.

**NEW Ensuring that birds enter the gas in a single layer within the tray/on the conveyor floor, rather than on top of one another, whether in trays or on conveyors, will help to ensure that all birds are killed by the gas and not by suffocation.**

**CK 2.3** Particular care must be taken to ensure that there are no air pockets that could reduce the effectiveness of the gas.

**CK 2.4** There must be a constant supply of gas mixture readily available at all times while disposing of birds.

**CK 2.5** There must be a system or procedure in place to determine when the gas supply is coming to an end.

**CK 2.5.1** NEW Birds must be exposed to the gas mixture for the following minimum duration:

a) chicks: 3 minutes

b) poults and ducklings: 5 minutes.

**CK 2.5.2** NEW LEGAL Birds must be dead on exit from the system.

**CK 2.6** REVISED All birds must be checked to ensure that all are dead before disposing of the carcases.

**CK 2.6.1** REVISED Records relating to standard CK 2.6 must be:

a) kept, and

b) updated daily.

**CK 2.7** NEW If any birds are observed to be alive on exit from the system:

a) the equipment must be stopped immediately

b) action must be taken without delay to investigate the cause(s)

c) the cause(s) of the issue must be rectified prior to more birds entering the system

d) a record of the cause(s) and action(s) taken to rectify the issue must be kept.

## Instantaneous mechanical destruction (maceration)

**NEW The RSPCA acknowledges that instantaneous mechanical destruction (mechanical equipment with rapidly rotating blades) can be an emotive topic and is aesthetically unpleasant. However, evidence shows that if well designed, managed and maintained equipment is used by competent operators, then this method delivers an immediate and humane death.**

**The RSPCA will continue to review the standards relating to bird culling and killing in light of any further developments in this area or scientific research.**

**CK 3.1** REVISED Where instantaneous mechanical destruction is employed as a method of culling/killing:

a) the birds must not be deflected upwards by the blades or projections of the mechanical device

b) the birds must go straight into the blades or projections

c) death must be caused instantaneously

d) the drop into the mechanical device must be kept to a minimum

e) the machinery must:

i. be set up according to the manufacturer's specification

ii. operate at the speed recommended by the manufacturers.

**CK 3.2** NEW To ensure the machinery is operating effectively the equipment must:

a) be checked at least twice a day, including prior to use at the start of the day

b) be cleaned after each use

c) have a weekly maintenance-check.

**CK 3.2.1** NEW Records relating to the checks in standard CK 3.2 must be kept.

**CK 3.2.2** NEW The operator must ensure that:

a) birds enter the machine at a rate that is compatible with its capacity at all times

b) all birds are killed instantaneously.

REVISED **One way to ensure death is being achieved instantaneously is to examine the post-macerated waste, which should contain no identifiable, whole body parts (with exception of the limbs).**

**CK 3.2.3** NEW Should the equipment not be running effectively, or any chicks are found to be alive upon exit from the equipment:

a) the equipment must

   i. be stopped immediately

   ii. not be used until the issue is rectified.

b) a record of the incident must be recorded, including:

   i. the number of birds affected

   ii. actions taken to rectify the problem

   iii. actions taken to prevent a recurrence.

REVISED **The RSPCA is reviewing the types of instantaneous mechanical destruction equipment available.**

**Hatcheries looking to install new, or replace existing, instantaneous mechanical destruction equipment must advise the RSPCA Farm Animals Department prior to installation to discuss the suitability of such equipment.**

**CK 3.3** REVISED All hatchery waste must be treated by rapid instantaneous mechanical destruction so as to instantaneously kill any living embryos.

# Transport

**T 1.1** NEW Where birds are to be transported by rail, air or sea:

a) permission must be sought annually from the RSPCA Farm Animals Department prior to transport

b) the RSPCA Farm Animals Department's written response must be made available on request.

NEW **When requesting permission to transport birds by rail, air or sea, the following details are to be included:**

- **location of the hatchery**
- **location of the rearing unit(s)**
- **proposed route, including expected journey time**
- **how the health and welfare of the birds will be ensured.**

**T 1.2** Care must be taken when transferring birds to transport containers prior to transportation.

**T 1.3** Where birds are transferred into transport containers direct from an automatic conveyor belt, measures must be taken to minimise any risk of injury caused to the birds.

**T 1.2.1** Packing materials used inside transport containers must be dry and free from moulds.

**T 1.4** The design of containers must ensure that there is adequate ventilation and air circulation to maintain an optimal temperature within the container during transportation.

**T 1.5** The transport containers must be designed to optimise airflow when they are stacked.

**T 1.6** Holding facilities must:

a) maintain thermal comfort

b) ensure that birds are protected from any draughts.

**T 1.7** The level of lighting in the hatching facility must be reduced to keep the birds calm.

**T 1.8** Birds must be delivered to the rearing unit within 24 hours of the time of removal from the hatchers.

NEW **The RSPCA is currently reviewing the need for, and practicalities associated with, providing birds with water (e.g. as a gel block) during transport to the rearing unit.**

**We would welcome any hauliers providing, or considering providing, water during transport contacting the RSPCA Farm Animals Department to help with our review.**

**T 1.9** Transport containers and vehicles must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after carrying each consignment of birds.

**T 1.10** The cleanliness of the transporter must be checked, and records signed accordingly, by an appointed supervisor before any new birds are loaded onto the vehicle.

**T 1.11** The number of birds placed in each container must ensure that birds have sufficient room to:

a) avoid overcrowding

b) maintain a thermally comfortable environment.

**T 1.12** **LEGAL** Each transport container must provide 21 to 25cm$^2$ of floor space per bird.

**The space allowance in standard T 1.12 is a legal requirement. The variation in space allowance is to allow for adjustment according to not only the weight and size of the birds, but also their physical condition, the meteorological conditions and the likely journey time.**

**Research has shown that the incidence of ascites in meat chickens was significantly greater when chicks were either transported at 80 or 150 per container compared with 100 per container. The data suggested that 100 chicks per container is optimal and at other densities a possible stress effect is present.**

**T 1.13** The height of the transport containers must:

a) enable the birds to maintain a normal posture when standing

b) prevent birds from escaping.

**T 1.14** When placed in the transporter, transport containers must be properly secured to prevent movement and disturbance to the birds during transportation.

**T 1.15** The transporter must be fitted with appropriate equipment that:

a) ensures a controlled environment

b) maintains a constant internal temperature of the vehicle during transportation.

**T 1.16** The internal temperature of the vehicle must be maintained at 24°C and the temperature variation must not be in excess of 3°C above or below this temperature.

**T 1.17** Standard T 1.16 must be satisfied prior to loading the birds.

**T 1.18** A suitable monitoring device must be fitted to alert the driver of any changes to this range of temperatures to enable the driver to respond accordingly.

**T 1.19** Contingency plans must be in place in case of the event of a failure in the temperature control system, which include appropriate contact numbers of relevant personnel.

**T 1.20** All transporters must have a ‘livestock capacity document’ on board at all times.

**The livestock capacity document gives data on the size of the transporter and the calculated carrying capacity for birds.**

**T 1.21** The timing of transport must be planned to minimise waiting time for birds on arrival at the destination.

**T 1.22** Every effort must be made to ensure journeys are completed without unnecessary delays.

**T 1.23** Contingency plans must be in place in case there are delays.

**T 1.24** All drivers must have a means of communication and an emergency procedure manual that contains all necessary emergency contact numbers.

**T 1.25** Drivers must be familiar with appropriate procedures that need to be taken in the event of an emergency.

**T 1.26** Any deaths and injuries that have occurred during transportation must be:

a) recorded

b) reported to the hatchery.

**T 1.27** NEW All personnel involved in the transport of chicks must be:

a) properly trained

b) competent to carry out their duties.

**NEW Where possible training relating to standard T 1.27 should be validated.**

# Cleaning and disinfection of equipment

**CDE 1.1** There must be a specific programme for emptying and cleaning multi-stage setters.

**CDE 1.2** All single-stage setters, hatchers and equipment must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected using disinfectants (approved by Defra, and using the correct dilution factor) before placing a new batch of eggs.

**CDE 1.3** Regular testing for contamination e.g. salmonella, must be carried out and records of results kept.

**CDE 1.4** All equipment must be:

a) properly installed

b) maintained in good working order.

**CDE 1.5** Records of checks carried out must be dated with a time and signed.

# Index

RSPCA.

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