

Changes to MHS charges for official controls

On 11 September 2009, the MHS wrote to all Food Business Operators (FBOs) to explain the charging arrangements that would operate from 28 September. The revised Charges Guide was also distributed and included an annex showing the revised hourly charge rates along with the calculation of the discount applicable to charges for individual premises. The discount has been calculated using 2008/09 hours and throughput. The discount ensures that if the mix of hours and throughput remain constant in 2009/10, charges will not increase.

If you have not received a copy of the revised Charges Guide or if you have any questions in relation to your discount, please contact the MHS Finance Department on 01904 455 573 or email revenue.accounting@mhs.gov.uk

The Charges Guide is regularly reviewed and paragraph 114 of the Guide provides contact details if you would like to give feedback on the Guide itself or any aspect of the charging policy.

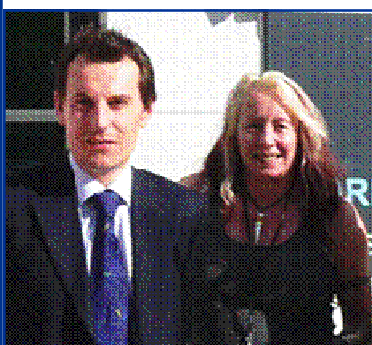
Transfer of responsibility for the approval of meat establishments

In Issue 12 of Link we advised that from 1 October 2009, the MHS would assume responsibility and authority for new applications for the approval of meat establishments requiring veterinary services in Great Britain. This includes the granting, reviewing, and where necessary, the withdrawal or suspension of approvals.

Jane Downes, Veterinary & Technical Director now has overall responsibility for this work. Three VMHAs have been seconded from the FSA to the MHS, as Veterinary Managers, to carry out the approvals work.

All administration relating to the approval of meat establishments and the maintenance of associated databases and records has been transferred from FSA teams in Wales, England and Scotland to a single team in MHS headquarters in York. Approval arrangements in Northern Ireland remain unchanged.

Michael Todd and Tracy Ostle (*pictured left*) are the new approvals administrative team and can be contacted on 01904 456182 or by fax on 01904 455420. You may also email approvals@mhs.gov.uk or write to: Approvals Team, Room 112 Foss House, Kings Pool, Peasholme Green, York YO1 7PR



Further information can be found online at:
www.food.gov.uk/foodindustry/meat/meatplantsprems

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Working co-operatively with FBOs to achieve compliance

As part of our strategy on compliance and enforcement, we want to ensure that FBOs are complying with legal requirements and are taking responsibility for the production of safe meat seriously. We want to be more open and transparent in our approach by letting FBOs know what we are doing and why. We also want to work with FBOs to ensure compliance through **education and co-operation**, balancing this against the need to support our staff taking enforcement action where necessary.

We are aware that some businesses are not consistently and sustainably meeting the required standards and have recently issued individual letters to these 'cause for concern' businesses to encourage them to put in place action to raise their levels of compliance and bring their standards to acceptable levels. Our decision to issue letters to FBOs identified as a cause for concern has been based on MHS audit assessments and trends in recent months. We have particularly focused on audit scores in relation to hygienic production, environmental hygiene and our confidence in the FBO's food safety management (or HACCP based) systems, as these are the areas that FBOs have the most control over.

It is important to stress that the businesses that we have identified as a cause for concern represent only a very small proportion (6%) of the 1,137 approved meat premises in England, Scotland and Wales.

We will measure the success of our approach through the number of businesses that come out of the cause for concern category, through raising the standards of their compliance and achieving improved audit scores. You can find out more by reading Geoff Ogle and Peter Styler's general letter to FBOs and the supporting questions and answers brief, issued on 6 October 2009. Letters were sent to cause for concern premises on 12 October 2009. FBOs with any specific questions on their individual premises should get in touch with their Business Manager, Lead Veterinarian or OV.

Cancellation and return of cattle passports to BCMS

An important part of the slaughter process is to ensure that FBOs pass all cattle passports to MHS staff for 'cancellation' and return to BCMS. When cattle are moved to a licensed slaughterhouse, the FBO is required to:

- record on the passport that the animal has been slaughtered, along with the date of slaughter;
- mark the passport with the name and address of the slaughterhouse;
- sign the passport, and
- give it to the MHS Official Veterinarian or his representative.

Full details are given in the Meat Industry Guide - **Part Two, 9.4, Annex A1, Animal Identification (GB), Page 57.**

BCMS have informed the MHS that there are a number of passports which have not been returned to BCMS for which a 'movement to slaughter' has been recorded on the Cattle Tracing System (CTS). This is the online system used for checking and reporting cattle information including, births, deaths and movements. It is critical that each entry is fully supported with the necessary documentation. BCMS have agreed to a 'passport amnesty' at the present time to allow any outstanding passports to be returned regardless of how delayed their return is. FBOs are asked to pass all outstanding cattle passports to the MHS OV for return to BCMS.



BSE testing of imported cattle

All FBOs concerned with OTM and UTM slaughter have received, or will shortly receive, a letter advising them of the BSE testing requirements for imported cattle. The O48M BSE testing requirement only applies to cattle **born** in the following Member States: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Slovenia, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Cattle born in one of the listed Member States (note that the list is subject to change) should have the following prefix on the identification on its eartag:

Austria	AT	Italy	IT
Belgium	BE	Luxembourg	LU
Denmark	DK	Netherlands	NL
Finland	FI	Portugal	PT
France	FR	Slovenia	SI
Germany	DE	Spain	ES
Greece	EL	Sweden	SE
Ireland	IE	United Kingdom	UK

If an animal's passport or eartag has a prefix not in the list above, DO NOT SLAUGHTER THE ANIMAL - return it to the lairage pen and contact the MHS Official Veterinarian immediately.

This is because:

- Cattle with ear tags which do **not** have the prefixes listed above must be BSE tested at O30M (healthy slaughter) or O24M (emergency slaughter or sick at ante-mortem).
- Cattle which were born in a Third Country* must be BSE tested at O30M (healthy slaughter) or O24M (emergency slaughter or sick at ante-mortem).

* **Note:** Cattle born in a Third Country (i.e. not one of the **27** EU Member States) and imported into a Member State will be re-tagged with a tag showing the importing Member State's prefix (unless slaughtered within 20 days). The Third Country import information should be available in the passport.

For more details of the models of eartags, passports and holding registers used in the different Member States see this EU website:

http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/identification/bovine/id_bovine_animals_en.htm

Cattle born or imported into the UK before 1 August 1996 are permanently banned from the food and feed chains.

More SRM changes on the way

In July 2007, the FSA Board agreed that the MHS should develop and implement a risk-based audit and inspection regime for SRM controls. A stepwise approach to delivery of the required changes was agreed.

The first step of changes was introduced in November 2007 - these removed the requirement for the MHS apply the personal stamp to UTM cattle, sheep and goat carcasses.

The second step of changes was introduced in 2008. This included moving to a risk-based approach to some of the controls on handling SRM after removal, and moving to 'cold inspection' in smaller establishments (see Link Issue 7).

More SRM changes on the way (continued from p3)

The third step of changes was introduced in January 2009. This included the FBO taking responsibility for correctly identifying which sheep and goats require their spinal cord to be removed as SRM.

We now move onto the fourth step of changes. This involves:

- ◆ setting the frequency of verification checks of separation, staining, storage and disposal of SRM in abattoirs handling OTM cattle on a risk basis in line with the approach applied for UTM cattle.
- ◆ replacing full time official presence in cutting plants removing OTM vertebral column (VC) with a more risk-based daily check and removing the requirement for the MHS/DARD to seal and unseal vehicles transferring the carcasses.
- ◆ removing the requirement for continuous official presence to verify removal of SRM from OTM bovines at small, low throughput abattoirs with high levels of compliance. The full inspection of the carcasses and checks on staining and disposal of SRM would be maintained. This is referred to as 'cold inspection' and guidance is available from your OV or Lead Veterinarian, should you wish to consider 'cold inspection'.



Spinal cord

These changes will be implemented on 2 November 2009. You can access the FSA Board paper on SRM changes via this link: www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/board/fsa090505.pdf

New guidance for assessing suitability of Food Business Operators to implement PIA systems in poultry slaughterhouses

The MHS has introduced a standardised process for assessing the suitability of poultry slaughterhouses to implement PIA systems. This replaces localised arrangements that we have previously had in place. Lead Veterinarians will complete assessments for those FBOs wishing to move to a PIA system, in consultation with the slaughterhouse OV. The assessment will be in accordance with requirements in Regulation (EC) 854/2004 and will take into account the FBO's use of good hygiene practice and food safety management systems in place. Where requirements are met, trained and authorised PIAs may then be permitted to carry out official control duties.

During September and early October, Lead Veterinarians will have completed standardised assessments for poultry slaughterhouses already using PIA systems.

Any FBO wishing to transfer to a PIA system in the future should discuss arrangements with their MHS Business Manager and Lead Veterinarian at the earliest opportunity, so that timescales for introduction can be considered and the impact on existing MHS staffing at the premises can be reviewed.

The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) 2006 Regulations preserve employees' terms and conditions when a business or undertaking, or part of one, is transferred to a new employer. A decision on whether to introduce a PIA system is a commercial matter for a FBO and any FBO wishing to implement a PIA system should seek their own legal advice on the impact of TUPE.

Details of the new assessment process are available from Liz Olney, MHS Delivery Planning Manager (email: liz.olney@mhs.gov.uk)

Meat Trades / HSE Joint Working Party launches health and safety poster

The Meat Trades / HSE Joint Working Party recently launched their 'cattle can kill' poster with a letter and poster to every abattoir approved to slaughter cattle and to livestock auctioneers. Noel Sykes, MHS Health and Safety Manager and outgoing Chair of the Joint Working Party comments:



Noel Sykes

“Continuing with our theme of guidance ‘by the industry, for the industry’, we hope this poster will help support an important message, which is simply to be aware that ‘cattle can kill’. The poster aims to raise awareness of the dangers associated with escaped cattle.

The Joint Working Party, hosted by the BMPA, has worked on this project for almost a year and all parties who have staff working amongst cattle, including industry and the MHS, should benefit from this important message. Feedback so far has been very positive”.

The HSE funded the production costs of the poster which is in a durable plastic format capable of being displayed at a range of locations where cattle are handled.

You can download further copies of the poster from BMPA’s website at: www.bmpa.uk.com/content/sft-Health.asp



New Chair of the Meat Trades / HSE Joint Working Party

Noel Sykes’s term of office as Chair of the Meat Trades / HSE Joint Working Party has ended and Paul Mitchell, Veterinary Director of Hall Mark Meat Hygiene Ltd will now take the seat for the next two years.

Noel commented “I have enjoyed my time as Chair and I have certainly had lively debates to manage along the way. Paul has always made a contribution to everything we have done and I know he is looking forward to the challenge. I wish him well in the role”.

Paul comments “The Joint Working Party is a very effective group and the recent collaborative work on the cattle safety awareness poster is proof of this.

Personally, I am passionate about ensuring that Health and Safety principles are integrated into everyday working and that advice given to individuals and the industry is practical, relevant and up to date. It is important that people regard health and safety information in a positive light and a way of improving everyone’s quality of life“.



Paul Mitchell

Feedback on MHS services

The annual MHS Industry Survey gives Food Business Operators an opportunity to comment on MHS service delivery from both the operational and office teams. The aim of the survey is to use the results to improve services and the results also allow us to obtain a year on year gauge of satisfaction levels.

The results of the 2009 survey are summarised below:

- ◆ When asked to rate satisfaction with the performance of MHS staff in plants, 96% of respondents said that they were satisfied or extremely satisfied – a 4% increase on the previous year.
- ◆ 82% feel that the MHS is an effective enforcement body, a 4% increase on the previous year.
- ◆ 90% of respondents feel that, in general, they receive fair and equal treatment by the MHS, a 7% increase on the previous year.
- ◆ When asked whether MHS services had improved or declined in 2008, 42% of respondents felt that services had either greatly improved or improved a little (a 6% rise on the previous year). 52% felt that services remained unchanged (as last year).
- ◆ FBOs were also asked to rate their satisfaction with the overall quality of MHS services on a 1-10 scale, where 1 indicated they were 'extremely dissatisfied' and 10 indicated they were 'extremely satisfied'. Of those who responded 76% gave the MHS a score of 7 or above. The average score was 7.6, a rise on the previous year.



Thank you to all FBOs who took part in the survey. Where plant specific issues were raised, these will be addressed locally.

Contact us

We want Link to be a useful and informative publication. Please contact us with any suggestions, comments or ideas for articles. If you would like to receive Link in a different format, please let us know. You can contact us at link@mhs.gov.uk or call 01904 455558. This is your opportunity to tell us about the issues most important to you. We look forward to hearing from you.

MHS Communications.



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The Meat Hygiene Service is an executive
agency of the Food Standards Agency

