



RSPCA welfare standards for

LAYING HENS



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Contents

Introduction	(iv)
Food and water	1
Food	1
Water	2
Environment	4
Buildings	4
Floor and litter	6
Lighting	8
Space requirements and flock size	9
Air quality and thermal environment	10
Nest boxes	11
Perches	12
Multi-tier	13
Environmental enrichment	16
Climate change and animal welfare	17
The range	18
Management	18
Shade/shelter	21
Popholes	21
Stocking density	22
Natural cover and enrichment	23
Biosecurity	24
Management	25
Managers	25
Stock-keepers	26
Inspection	26
Equipment	27
Protection from other animals	27
Pullets	29
Broody hens	29
Health	31
Health and welfare monitoring	31
Beak trimming	35
Medication	37
Biosecurity	37
Casualty killing/slaughter	38
Transport	40
Depopulation	40
Transport	43

Slaughter/killing	47
Management and training	47
Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)	48
Lairage	49
Shackling	50
Stunning	52
Bleeding	54
Controlled Atmosphere Systems (CAS)	55
Planned on-farm slaughter/killing	57
Appendix 1 – Operating and emergency procedures	59
Appendix 2 – Depopulation action plan (DAP)	60
Index	66

Introduction

* The '*RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens*' are used to provide the only RSPCA-approved scheme for the rearing, handling, transport and slaughter/killing of laying hens. The '*RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens*' take account of legislation, government welfare codes, scientific research, veterinary advice, recommendations of the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC) and the practical experience of the farming industry. The standards are based upon the 'Five Freedoms' as defined by FAWC (hence the name 'Freedom Food' - see page v).

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

- (i) The numbered requirements are the standards, all of which must be complied with.
- (ii) 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.
- * (iii) It is expected that all relevant UK legislation regarding farm animal husbandry and welfare on-farm, during transport, and at the abattoir, will be fully implemented in addition to the RSPCA welfare standards.
- (iv) **Farmers are required by law to have a thorough knowledge of the '*Defra Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Laying Hens*'.**



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.

The standards also take account of feedback from RSPCA Farm Livestock Officers, who carry out monitoring of the Freedom Food scheme, Freedom Food Assessors who audit scheme members, and the scheme members themselves.

We always value constructive feedback and ideas for improvement from those who are implementing the RSPCA welfare standards. Comments/feedback can be discussed with:

- i) RSPCA Farm Animals Department scientific staff, by contacting them on the below details:

Address: Farm Animals Department

RSPCA
Wilberforce Way
Southwater
Horsham
West Sussex
RH13 9RS

Telephone: 0300 123 0183

Email: farm-animals@rspca.org.uk

- ii) RSPCA Farm Livestock Officers, who can discuss any issues during farm visits and offer advice, and can provide feedback to the RSPCA Farm Animals Department scientific staff.



Freedom Food Ltd

Freedom Food is the RSPCA's farm assurance and food labelling scheme. Freedom Food assesses and approves farms, hauliers and abattoirs that meet all of the applicable RSPCA welfare standards. Processors and packers must also apply for scheme membership for traceability and licence fee purposes.

Only approved suppliers and outlets using approved suppliers may use the Freedom Food certification mark subject to traceability and licence fee. Membership is subject to an annual membership fee and successful assessment as well as risk based monitoring visits by Farm Livestock Officers from the RSPCA's Farm Animals Department.

Freedom Food is a charity in its own right and not for profit. Any surplus goes back into improving farm animal welfare.

Food and water

Livestock need to have ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and promote a positive state of well-being.

Food

- FW 1.1** All units must have a written feeding programme to ensure that hens are fed a wholesome diet which:
- is appropriate to their stage of production
 - is fed to them in sufficient quantity to maintain them in good health
 - satisfies their nutritional needs
 - is provided at all times each day, except when required by the attending veterinary surgeon
 - includes a written record of the nutrient content of the feed as declared by the feed compounder
 - includes provision of insoluble grit designed for use by poultry (e.g. flint) of appropriate size and quantity
 - includes provision of insoluble grit no less than once weekly.

i The provision of insoluble grit for laying hens is considered to be very important to aid digestion and should be provided throughout their lives (for further recommendations see the RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)).

The recommended size of grit for a hen is 6.35 to 8.0mm.

The recommended amount per hen is 7g per bird per week, with food (not in track feeders) or placed in a separate feeder.

i In the event of feather loss, the availability and energy content of the feed may need to be increased to help hens compensate for greater heat loss and comply with FW 1.1.

- * **i** Various aspects of diet have been shown to help minimise the risk of injurious feather pecking in laying hens and should be considered, such as:
- increasing opportunity for foraging behaviours by providing mashed feed and scattering pellets/whole grain/grit evenly on the litter
 - providing extra fibre in consultation with a feed supplier and/or nutritionist
 - ensuring sodium content of feed is appropriate
 - ensuring the supply of an appropriate balance of essential amino acids
 - minimising, or making any changes to the diet gradual, including content, taste, texture, energy level and stepping down protein levels
 - contacting the feed supplier and/or consult a nutritionist for further advice.

FW 1.2 Particular attention must be given to the provision of food and water in areas frequented by subordinate hens.

FW 1.3 No feedstuffs containing mammalian or avian derived protein are permitted.

FW 1.4 The use of in-feed growth promoters is prohibited.

- FW 1.5** In-feed antibiotics may only be given for therapeutic reasons under the direction of the attending veterinary surgeon.
- FW 1.6** All foodstuffs fed must be safely and hygienically stored, transported and delivered to stock to prevent infestation or contamination or wetting.
- FW 1.7** Food must not be allowed to remain in a contaminated or stale condition.
- FW 1.8** 5cm of (actual) linear track (10cm single side) or 4cm of circular feeding space must be provided and be accessible for each bird.

* **i** As a guide, in order to ensure that the feed track is accessible to birds where feed tracks run parallel to one another, there should be a clear space of at least 60cm on either side of the feeder. Where feed tracks run close to other facilities or walls and there is no back to back feeding, this space should be about 40cm.

- FW 1.9** Hand replenished feed systems with no integral store of food are prohibited.
- FW 1.10** Wire over feeders and drinkers must:
- a) not be electrified
 - b) be demonstrated not to be ever connected to an electricity source.

i Where there is a risk of contamination of food and water, producers should use alternative devices, such as roller bars, to discourage the birds from perching over feeding and drinking facilities.

- FW 1.11** Feed distribution must ensure uniform feed availability throughout the entire feeder system.

Water

- FW 2.1** Hens must be provided with water:
- a) that is clean and fresh
 - b) at all times, except when required by the attending veterinary surgeon.
- FW 2.2** Provision must be made for supplying water in freezing conditions.
- FW 2.3** The minimum number of drinkers which must be provided is as follows:
- | | |
|---|---------------|
| a) nipples | 1 per 10 hens |
| cups | 1 per 10 hens |
| circular trough space (including bells) | 1.0cm per hen |
| linear trough space | 2.5cm per hen |
- b) never less than 2.
- FW 2.4** All drinkers must be in working order.
- FW 2.5** Header tanks must be covered at all times.

FW 2.6 Drinkers must be:

- a) placed at optimum height for the size and age of the birds
- b) of an appropriate design.

FW 2.7 * Non-mains water must be:

- a) tested every 6 months at the source to assess its drinking quality, and a record kept of this
- b) certified potable.

*



Water, including borehole water, should be tested regularly, and at least annually, at the point where the birds are able to drink it. Results should be recorded, and including in relation to FW 2.7, should be:

Coliforms: < 100 colony forming units (cfus) per ml

Total viable counts: < 1,000 cfus per ml

Environment

The environment in which livestock are kept needs to take into account their welfare needs and be designed to protect them from physical and thermal discomfort, fear and distress, and allow them to perform their natural behaviour.

E 1.0 Where management systems, designs or layout of facilities not covered in the RSPCA welfare standards are being employed or considered, these must be referred to, and discussed with, the RSPCA Farm Animals Department before they can be considered for certification.

E 1.1 Buildings must be designed, constructed, maintained and sited to:

- protect hens from thermal discomfort
- be suitable for local weather conditions and withstand expected seasonal extremes of weather.

E 1.2 Where changes are being made to existing buildings or new equipment installed that has not previously been assessed, managers must inform Freedom Food at the time the change is being made.

i It is strongly recommended to discuss any proposed changes, referred to in E 1.2, in relation to the RSPCA welfare standards with the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.

* **i** The most common cause of injurious feather pecking is change, so any changes in housing and facilities should therefore be made gradually and birds closely monitored.

Producers should also pay particular attention to the birds after any sudden external environmental changes, such as in the weather, noise or light intensity or duration.

Buildings

E 2.1 For all accommodation, a notice containing a checklist of the key points relating to welfare (see E 2.2) must be prominently displayed at, or near, the entrance to each building and be amended accordingly.

E 2.2 The checklist to satisfy E 2.1 must include:

- total usable area available to the birds
- total number of birds and stocking density
- total number of drinkers and feeders
- target air quality parameters
- lighting levels and regimes
- emergency procedures, i.e. actions in the case of fire, failure of automatic equipment, when temperatures move outside acceptable limits and extremes of weather such as flooding and storm damage
- nest box area available for each bird.

E 2.3 There must be nothing in the hens' environment that is likely to cause injury or distress to the birds that can be avoided.

E 2.4 Except where preservatives with an insecticidal role are used, hens must not come into contact with toxic fumes, for example from paints, wood preservatives or disinfectants.

E 2.5 * All electrical installations at mains voltage must be maintained in order to be:

- a) inaccessible to the hens
- b) well insulated
- c) safeguarded from rodents
- d) properly earthed
- e) tested at least annually by a qualified or competent person
- f) in good working order (for example, any faults identified during testing to be rectified).

i **By law electrical installations have to be tested every 3 years as part of the Periodic Inspection Report. However, at least once a year, the ‘trip switch’ should be tested to ensure it is in correct working order.**

E 2.6 * Housing and equipment must be designed so that hens can be clearly seen during inspection.

E 2.7 Provision must be made to ensure claw wear; if the substrate beneath the litter does not do this adequately, abrasive strips must be made available.

E 2.8 Birds must not have access to the droppings pit.

***** **i** **Hens that gain access to the droppings pit can easily become stuck and suffer significantly, or die, from lack of food, water and other facilities that are required by law and/or within the RSPCA welfare standards.**

E 2.8.1 * The structure and inside of the droppings pit (where present) must be checked:

- a) at least once daily, and
- b) a record made of this check, and
- c) a record made of any birds found, removed and action taken to prevent further access to this area.

E 2.9 The service area must be kept clean and tidy.

E 2.10 Where the main slatted area over a droppings pit is at a height of 1m or more above the litter area, ramps or alighting rails must be in place in order to assist birds moving between the two levels.

E 2.11 Ramps or alighting rails relating to E 2.10 must be:

- a) either provided at a minimum of 2m for every 600 birds, or along the entire length of the slats
- b) evenly distributed along the line of access from the slatted area to the litter if provided in sections.

i **Where ramps have shallow angles (e.g. below 20°) extra management and attention may be required to ensure that bird droppings do not build-up beneath the ramp to levels where bird welfare may become affected.**

The RSPCA is considering setting a maximum angle for ramps so as to minimise potential for injury and ease movement of birds through the unit. Houses should aim to keep angles below 60°.

E 2.12 The use of electric matting, or wire that prevents access to areas of useable area (e.g. crisscrossing over an area), is not permitted.

* **i** The use of single line electric wire around the edges of the house is permitted only where there are advantages to the hens' welfare in using it e.g. to prevent smothering in corners and at the edges of the building/colony divisions.

To help minimise the risk of smothering and help birds move to safety in such an incident, the design of corners/edges and use of physical barriers rather than electric wire should be carefully considered.

E 2.13 The apron immediately surrounding the outside of the house must:

- a) be kept clean and tidy
- b) not offer shelter to wild birds or rodents
- c) be well managed with vegetation, if present, kept short.

Floor and litter

E 3.1 Hen house flooring must allow effective cleansing and disinfection, preventing significant build up of parasites and other pathogens.

i Where possible, the house floor should be concrete that is well maintained.

E 3.2 * Housing for hens must provide access at all times to:

- a) well-maintained litter (except if keeping birds on slats for up to 3 days after the hens arrive at the unit, see E 3.2.1)
- b) a well-drained area for resting.

E 3.2.1 * If birds are held on the slats for up to 3 days after entering the unit, it must be demonstrated that access is not restricted from the litter after this period.

i Where appropriate, roller handles can be taken off or plastic ties used to hold up curtain to demonstrate that birds are not restricted from accessing the litter.

* **i** It is strongly recommended that hens are given access to litter immediately after arriving at the hen house. Restricting birds to the slatted area, if deemed necessary to help them settle and find food and water, should be for as short a time as possible. This applies to all systems, including multi-tier.

Access to litter when hens first arrive at the laying unit allows them to perform natural behaviours on a substrate they are already familiar with and space to spread out in the house. This in turn can help minimise stress and has been shown to be a factor in minimising the risk of injurious feather pecking.

- E 3.3** The litter must:
- a) be of a suitable material and particle size
 - b) be managed to maintain it in a dry, friable condition (and replaced where necessary)
 - c) be of a sufficient depth for dilution of faeces
 - d) allow birds to dust bathe
 - e) be topped up daily, if necessary, with fresh litter
 - f) be managed hygienically
 - g) be stored in dry, hygienic, rodent-proof premises.

*

i It is a legal requirement to keep the litter in a well-maintained state.

Well-maintained litter promotes birds' physical and behavioural well being and has been shown to help minimise the risk of injurious feather pecking. Consideration of factors to help manage litter condition include drinker design and management, stocking density, nutrition, flock health, air change rate and house environment, litter material and depth.

Super absorbent litter, like pelleted bedding material, can be very effective and is strongly recommended for use in areas of the house that are particularly difficult to manage.

- E 3.3.1** Slatted areas or mesh floors must provide:
- a) adequate support for inspections to be carried out
 - b) sufficient depth for the build up of droppings underneath.

E 3.4 Usable area in all hen houses must comprise of a minimum of one-third litter.

- E 3.5 *** Litter must:
- a) cover the floor in the first week after the hens first have access
 - b) be maintained at a minimum of 5cm after the first week and during the first 2 months of use
 - c) be maintained at a minimum of 10cm, by the latest, after the first 2 months of use.

- E 3.6** Stock-keepers must:
- a) be aware of the welfare problems associated with poor litter management
 - b) understand the factors which affect litter condition, i.e. moisture, nitrogen content and greasy capped litter.

- E 3.7** Where birds have access to litter through internal popholes, including to a veranda, the following applies:
- a) the popholes must be provided according to the minimum specification required for birds having access to the range (see R 3.2 and R 3.3)
 - b) where the area within the veranda is included in the calculation of usable area, access must be provided between the house and the veranda at all times, as defined in a).

i A pophole is defined as an opening of less than 2m in height that restricts the width of the building and is intended for the use of hens to access the range or litter.

i The RSPCA is considering an appropriate maximum distance hens should have to travel to reach the litter from the slatted area. Litter is very important for hen behaviours such as scratching and dustbathing, in both barn and free-range systems. Houses should allow the birds to easily move around and use all areas fully. As a guide, to minimise the distance to litter by preventing the house from being too long and narrow, a line of access from the slats to the litter should provide at least 2m per 600 hens.

- E 3.8** Where a veranda is present the following must be ensured:
- a) where the calculated floor area for stocking density incorporates litter on a veranda, the sides of the veranda must consist only of solid material from the ground to at least the top of the height of the pophole
 - b) adequate provisions must be made to prevent the area surrounding the veranda from flooding during wet weather
 - c) the roof must be entirely waterproof.

- E 3.9** Siting of the house must be considered in order to best be able to maintain and manage litter quality.

Lighting

i Lighting requirements apply to all indoor usable areas, which may include verandas.

- E 4.1** The lighting system in the hen house must provide in each period of 24 hours:
- a) a minimum period of 8 hours continuous light, by the provision of either artificial light or access to daylight
 - b) a minimum period of 6 hours continuous darkness in every 24 hour cycle, except when the natural darkness period is shorter.

i Where there are signs of stress in birds, producers should consider avoiding exposure to prolonged periods of light (i.e. in excess of 15 hours), to reduce the risk of health and behavioural problems developing.

- E 4.2** Lighting patterns in all houses must be recorded.

- E 4.3** Daytime lighting levels must allow birds to see and be inspected without difficulty.

E 4.4 The lighting system in hen houses must be designed and maintained in order to give a minimum of 10 lux throughout the house (with the exception of shaded areas).

* **i** Where injurious feather pecking or cannibalism is a problem, or to minimise the risk of a problem, ongoing management techniques (such as increasing environmental enrichment) should be put in place. Lighting levels should be maintained to allow and encourage birds to explore their environment. However, as a last resort in an emergency situation, and with the ongoing use of other possible solutions, lighting levels can be reduced or coloured/painted light bulbs can be used (green has been shown to help). This should only be for a short period of time, to help the birds settle. Lighting should then be increased gradually over a few days and returned to normal levels as soon as possible.

Advice should be sought from the attending veterinary surgeon in relation to these issues.

E 4.5 Patches of high intensity light (artificial or natural) must be avoided within a house.

i Varied lighting within the environment can help to encourage certain desired behaviours to take place, for example by increasing the levels of light over the litter area birds can be encouraged to dustbathe. Also, reducing the lighting levels over the perching area can enable birds to rest.

E 4.6 Artificial light must be switched off in a stepped or gradual manner to allow the hens to prepare for darkness.

E 4.7 In all hen housing, adequate lighting, whether fixed or portable, must be available to enable them to be thoroughly inspected at any time.

* **Space requirements and flock size**

E 5.1 All hens must have sufficient freedom of movement to be able, without difficulty, to stand normally, turn around and stretch their wings.

E 5.2 All hens must have sufficient space to be able to perch or sit quietly without repeated disturbance.

E 5.3 The stocking density must not exceed 9 laying hens per m² of usable area.

i Usable area is legally defined as an area at least 30cm wide with a floor slope not exceeding 14% (8°), with headroom of at least 45cm.

E 5.4 Nest areas (including nest tops) must not be included as part of the calculated usable area.

E 5.5 Egg belt covers in front of nest boxes and at floor level may be included as usable area.

E 5.6 For flocks with more than 6,000 birds the following maximum flock and colony (subdivision of a flock) sizes must be adopted:

Barn	max flock size	32,000 birds
	max colony size	4,000 birds
Free-range	max flock size	16,000 birds
	max colony size	4,000 birds

* **i** The division of large flocks into smaller, separate colonies is important to help keep the birds in manageable groups and well spaced throughout the house, with adequate access to facilities such as water, feed and nest boxes. It can also help to minimise problems of injurious feather pecking and stress and decreases the number of birds which could potentially be affected by an incident such as smothering. As such, internal divisions need to be constructed in a way to prevent any movement of hens between colonies.

In the case of free-range flocks, and particularly smaller flocks with colonies kept in separate houses, there may be some migration of birds to different colonies when the birds come inside from the range. This has not been reported to be a significant problem, but it should be considered and monitored to help ensure that the maximum stocking density inside is not exceeded. Further divisions on the range may help if this is found to be an issue (see information box below R 1.6).

E 5.7 Each flock must have separate feeding, watering, lighting and ventilation (where artificial) facilities and, in the case of free-range flocks, range areas.

Air quality and thermal environment

E 6.1 Producers must assess air quality at bird height on a daily basis.

E 6.2 Ventilation systems, natural or forced, must be designed and managed to maintain air quality, to ensure that aerial contaminants do not reach a level, at bird height, at which they are noticeably unpleasant to a human observer.

i Air quality parameters should be maintained under all foreseeable climatic conditions, below the following levels at bird head height:

Ammonia	25ppm
Carbon dioxide	5,000ppm
Carbon monoxide	50ppm (averaged over an 8 hour period)
Inhalable dust	10mg/m ³ (averaged over an 8 hour period)

The measurement for relative humidity should be between 50 and 70%.

Where practically feasible, air quality parameters, i.e. ammonia, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, etc. should be measured and recorded on a weekly basis. Where a level higher than that specified within the standards is recorded, daily recordings should be made until an acceptable level is achieved and maintained.

Where possible, these levels should be automatically recorded.

- E 6.3** Provision must be made to ensure that hens have access to a thermally comfortable environment at all times, so that heat/cold stress does not occur.
- E 6.4** Where roofs are not insulated, producers must be able to demonstrate that a thermally comfortable environment is maintained at all times.
- E 6.5** Stock-keepers must:
- a) have access to a copy of the Defra booklet, *'Heat Stress in Poultry: Solving the Problem'* (PB 10543, 2005)
 - b) be familiar with its content
 - c) adopt its recommendations, where appropriate.

Nest boxes


- E 7.1** Nest boxes must be:
- a) provided at not less than 1 per 5 hens if individual boxes, or 1m² of nesting substrate per 120 hens for group nesting
 - b) enclosed and draught-free.
- E 7.2** Nest boxes must be provided with a suitable floor substrate that:
- a) encourages nesting behaviour
 - b) minimises the risk of build up of parasites and disease
 - c) is managed hygienically
 - d) does not consist of wire or plastic-coated wire that can come into contact with the birds.

* **i** Hens should be given sufficient time to become accustomed to the nest boxes prior to coming into lay. Any floor eggs should be picked up promptly and the provision of loose material can help encourage hens to use the nest boxes at the start of lay. Attention should be paid to any nest boxes being over-populated.

i Suitable floor substrates for nest boxes include clean straw, Astro Turf or dimpled rubber mats.

i Where nest boxes are situated in the middle of a system and access to facilities, such as the litter or range, is only available on one side of the house, there should be adequate crossovers for birds to easily access such facilities. It is recommended that crossovers should be incorporated at the same number and size as popholes (see R 3.2 and R 3.3) and calculated in terms of usable area and expected number of birds using the area behind the nest boxes.


- E 7.3 *** Nest box lighting must only be used:
- a) in the morning and
 - b) during initial nest box training, or
 - c) temporarily to help keep nest box usage even.

*  **None or limited use of nest box lighting has been shown to help minimise the risk of injurious feather pecking.**

Perches

 **These standards apply to all perching provided in a system, including the alighting rail immediately in front of the nest boxes.**

- E 8.1** Perches must be provided at not less than 15cm per hen, unless combined with slatted or mesh flooring (see E 8.5).
- E 8.1.1** Where slatted or mesh flooring is included in perching space, perches must be incorporated within the floor structure or attached on top of the floor surface (see E 8.5).
- E 8.2** Some perches must be raised above the floor space to allow hens to avoid aggressors.

*  **Aerial perch height should be such that hens are prevented from pecking each other in the vent area. As a guide perches should be available at about 50cm vertical distance above the slats/other perches.**

- E 8.2.1** Perches must not be mounted above the litter.
- E 8.3** Perches must have a horizontal distance of at least 30cm between them to be counted as perch space, although more perches may be provided adjacent to one another within a slatted or mesh floor.
- E 8.3.1** The horizontal distance between the perch and the wall must be at least 20cm.
- E 8.3.2 *** There must be at least enough vertical space above the perch to allow hens to stand in a normal position.

- E 8.4** Perches must:
- a) have an appropriate top surface width that supports the birds' feet
 - b) have no sharp edges
 - c) be designed and constructed to avoid damage to the feet.

i Whilst some evidence from scientific research indicates that in terms of the perch shape hens have no preference, other studies have demonstrated that rectangular perches are used more than circular perches, on which birds are unsteady. Foot damage has also been shown to be less in birds provided with rectangular perches than with circular perches.

In terms of material, birds have been shown to perch most on slightly rough surfaces (e.g. softwood or vinyl-padded), which give more grip for their feet, and the least on smoother, plastic perches. Whilst hygiene is often better on plastic perches, they have been shown to result in increased incidences of bumble foot compared to welded wire and wooden perches.

As a guide, perches should be raised approximately 25cm above the floor and have a top surface of approximately 4cm in width.

- E 8.5** Where the slatted or mesh floored area is counted as perch space this must be provided at no less than 460cm² per bird.

- E 8.6** There must be a gap of no less than 1.5cm on either side of any perch to allow hens to grip the perches without risk of trapping their claws.

- E 8.7** Perches must be positioned to minimise fouling of any hens below.

i Producers should note that on interpretation of Council Directive 1999/74/EC laying down minimum standards for the protection of laying hens, slatted floors are not considered as perches in Scotland or Northern Ireland, where producers have reported positive welfare and production results from using aerial perching. Aerial perching for all hens may be required in the UK in the future. The RSPCA will be reviewing this standard, in light of any further evidence or amended interpretation by Defra.

Multi-tier

i These standards are specific to any system incorporating raised tiers. Producers requiring further advice should liaise with the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.

- E 9.1** The following multi-tier standards must be read in conjunction with the rest of this document.

i A tier is defined as a raised slatted area that may provide perches, food and/or water for the birds and provides access for birds underneath.

Tiers, in addition to floor area, can be counted as usable area.

Slats are defined as a slatted or mesh area where there is a droppings pit underneath. Such slats are not regarded as tiers and count as floor area (in addition to the litter) as in non-tiered units.

- E 9.2 *** The overall design of multi-tier systems must:
- a) allow for proper inspection of all birds at all levels
 - b) enable immediate access to any sick, injured or dead birds which require removal
 - c) allow and encourage free movement within and around the system, meaning no system preventing full access along the length of the tier will be permitted.

* **i** With reference to E 9.2 c), knowledge and experience of multi-tier systems which are, for example, similar to enriched cages but without doors (i.e. with a nest, water and food available in separate sections along the length of the tier and access down to litter, and range where available), strongly suggests that the birds are not as active as can be seen in other designs of multi-tier. This leads to further concerns that where range is available birds in such systems will not use it fully.

Further advice should be sought from the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.

- E 9.3** Consideration must be given to the placement and removal of flocks when implementing multi-tier systems in new or existing buildings, ensuring ready access for careful handling of birds at all levels, without causing injury.
- E 9.4** Where birds are on tiers above head height, there must be facilities provided to ensure that those involved with catching or inspection procedures do not have to climb on the side of the tiered structure.
- E 9.5** The maximum stocking density must:
- a) not exceed 9 birds/m² of usable area
 - b) when calculated at floor level, not exceed 15 birds/m².
- E 9.6** Each tier must:
- a) facilitate the movement of birds between the different tiers, and between tiers and slats
 - b) ensure that birds can gain access to the floor area
 - c) ensure that birds can gain access to the range area in the case of free-range systems.
- E 9.7** All tiers must have a manure belt removal system, which must be run at frequent intervals (and in any case at least once a week).
- E 9.8** The maximum height of the highest tier, measured from the litter floor area to the underside of the manure belt of the highest tier, must not exceed 2m.
- E 9.9** The vertical distance between the different tiers (including the floor to first tier) must be at least 0.5m high and no more than 1m (measured from the slatted or floor level to the underside of the manure belt).
- E 9.10** Where birds move diagonally across tiers at different heights, or from tiers to slats and vice versa, the angle of descent must be no more than 45°.
- E 9.11** Where it is not intended for birds to move horizontally between different tiers, or between slats and tiers, there must be a gap of at least 2m.

i As a guide, in order that birds can move between adjacent tiers or between tiers and slats to gain access to the litter at floor level, the horizontal distance between tiers should be no greater than 80cm.

E 9.12 Where ramps are used, care must be taken to minimise the risk of droppings falling on birds below.

i The use of ramps may be incorporated within the design to facilitate the movement of birds from the floor to the first raised tier.

E 9.13 When flock size exceeds 3,000 the maximum number of raised tiers directly above each other must not exceed 2.

E 9.14 When flock size is under 3,000 the maximum number of raised tiers directly above each other must not exceed 3.

E 9.15 Where slats are present, a maximum of only 1 raised tier may be installed above this area.

E 9.16 Where birds are given access to the range the maximum distance they have to travel to the nearest pophole measured on floor area must be no more than 20m.

i Where possible, birds should be given access to the range area from both sides of the building in order to encourage ranging behaviour.

E 9.17 Hens must not have to travel more than 8m in the house to reach food and water.

* Environmental Enrichment

E 10.1 * For every 1,000 birds there must be at least 2 items of environmental enrichment inside the house.

- * **i** The inclusion of environmental enrichment has been shown to improve hen health and welfare by encouraging activity and decreasing the risk of injurious feather pecking. A variety of sufficient items, which are safe for bird use, should be appropriately placed throughout the unit to promote activity and interest and provide all birds with an opportunity to explore them.

Examples of environmental enrichment include hanging knotted rope/string, pecking blocks, vegetables and plastic bottles with coloured water, and providing dustbathing boxes, straw bales and plastic-wrapped bales of shavings.

Supplying a variety of such items and regularly changing them is strongly recommended to help maintain interest.

The provision of pecking blocks placed on the slatted area and knotted rope/string has been shown to be particularly beneficial in helping minimising injurious feather pecking. Breeze blocks are not advisable for pecking due to the nature of the ingredients, but blocks made with feed may be used. Rope/string can be suspended or attached to posts at hen head height and it is recommended to knot it near each end to prevent the entire rope from fraying.

Providing safe refuges, resting areas and visual barriers can help further. This can be in the form of perches, straw bales and areas of varied heights.

The University of Bristol's FeatherWel document 'Improving Feather Cover - a guide to reducing the risk of injurious pecking occurring in non-cage laying hens' and website www.featherwel.org should be consulted for further advice about enrichment.

- * **i** For hens kept indoors in barn systems, without access to the range, it is strongly recommended to consider the addition of a veranda/wintergarden. This will enrich the environment with natural light and ventilation, which can help increase activity and may decrease the risk of injurious feather pecking.

If this area is not calculated as usable area (i.e. only available in the daytime) it will help further by increasing the space available to the birds.

Any veranda/wintergarden needs to provide enough space for a number of birds to use the area at the same time, while minimising the risk of any birds smothering. Experience suggests that the area should be at least 2m wide.

Climate change and animal welfare

i The issues relating to climate change have the potential to significantly affect the welfare of farm animals. The RSPCA believes that it is now appropriate to react to, think ahead, and consider what can reasonably be done to mitigate, any negative effects that adverse weather conditions may have/be having on the welfare of farm animals now, and in the future.

Examples of important considerations include:

- The need to ensure that the farm buildings can withstand more severe weather conditions will become more necessary.
- Ensuring that ventilation systems are working efficiently will be even more important, particularly as poultry are vulnerable to adverse temperature changes.
- There may be reduced water availability for drinking, so ensuring that drinking water systems are working efficiently will be even more important.

The range

The RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens can be applied to barn or free-range systems. The following standards relate to range, where provided.

Management

R 1.0 A Range Management Plan, incorporating the standards in the range section, must be developed, implemented and annually updated.

- * **i** The Range Management Plan (R 1.0) is intended to help establish a focus on range quality and management as well as helping to show how the range standards are being met. As a guide, the following should be included:
- general details about the range – total available area, number of birds, stocking density
 - map – total range area, location of shade/shelters, natural cover, enrichment, rotated areas
 - protective overhead shade/shelter – type (natural/artificial), amount
 - natural cover – type, amount (expected area if not fully grown)
 - enrichment areas for dustbathing/perching/foraging – type, number, management
 - range use – e.g. shelters/enrichment rotation
 - strategy for heavily worn and poached areas
 - strategy to minimise build up of parasites/disease
 - details of any planned rotation of range areas
 - details of management of the area directly outside the popholes
 - procedure before new flock is placed – plan for heavily contaminated areas
 - general comments – observations of range use and any future plans.

R 1.1 Laying hens kept in free-range systems must have continuous daytime access to the range.

R 1.2 * Where birds are intended to be kept for free-range purposes, they must be given access to the range:

- a) within 3 weeks of entering the house at the latest (also see R 3.1)
- b) in any case from 21 weeks of age at the latest.

- * **i** Evidence strongly suggests that early access to the range can increase ranging behaviours and decrease the risk of injurious feather pecking. It is therefore strongly recommended to introduce birds to the range area as soon as possible after arrival at the laying hen unit.

A possible way of achieving this, while allowing the hens to get used to using the nest boxes inside in the morning, is to allow access outside in the afternoon to begin with. Also, a gradual approach to help the birds acclimatise before access to the range is given could involve allowing access to a veranda (where present) first, or using a temporary mesh over the popholes in the first few days to allow daylight and natural ventilation in to the house.

R 1.3 Where buildings are converted from barn to free-range when birds are older than 21 weeks, access to the range must be delayed until a new flock is placed (see R 1.2).

R 1.4 The range area must be actively managed in order to:

- a) encourage birds outside, away from the popholes and to use the area fully
- b) prevent and/or manage heavily poached/muddy/worn areas
- c) minimise any build up of parasites or disease.

*

- i** The aims of active management of the range are to encourage bird use as they can be fearful of exposed areas, help to maintain vegetation quality (including the area under shelters/cover/enrichment) and offer protection and shelter. Ways of satisfying R 1.4 may include:
- provision of natural cover such as trees, bushes and hedgerows
 - provision of a variety of types of both natural and artificial shade/shelters
 - appropriate distribution of shade/shelter and natural cover depending on the behaviour of the individual flock and distance hens are comfortable travelling between sources of overhead cover
 - provision of a 'corridor' of shade/shelter and natural cover to encourage birds onto the range
 - provision of artificial shade/shelters within the first 20m from the house and gradual moving of some further into the range
 - provision of well-managed areas of enrichment and variation, which may include suitable feed crops, herbs, trees and fruit bushes
 - provision of well-managed designated areas with additional facilities for dustbathing, perching and foraging, such as brushings from trees and covered sand areas
 - provision of good vegetation cover as close to the house as possible
 - practice of paddock rotation to promote range quality
 - restricted access to muddy/poached/worn areas to allow re-growth of vegetation
 - drainage improvements to prevent poached areas developing
 - particular attention being paid to the area immediately outside the popholes and up to about 30m from the popholes
 - surface tilling of the land to help remove worm eggs
 - introduction of other species such as llamas and alpacas where appropriate, which can help to encourage birds outside and protect against predators
 - situating popholes on more than one side of the house, which can be of particular importance in units with central nest boxes
 - provision of wind breaks, which may combine with provision of natural cover and shade/shelter
 - regular inspections of the range, which are necessary for effective management and can also be a good opportunity to help lead the birds out to different areas.

- i** European egg marketing regulations (EC 589/2008) require the range to be mainly covered with vegetation, but do not permit range areas to be used for other purposes, except for orchards, woodlands and livestock grazing. As such, arable cropping should not be regarded as acceptable vegetation on the range and shall be excluded from calculations for stocking density, except where plots of such crops are planted specifically to provide effective and appropriate shade/shelter and/or enrichment for birds on the range.

- R 1.5** The area directly outside the popholes must:
- not be allowed to remain in a muddy condition or with standing water
 - be maintained with short vegetation and/or,
 - covered with a draining material.

* **i** **Management of draining material and/or short vegetation outside popholes, an area which can be heavily used, is particularly important in helping to control worms, by exposure of droppings to ultraviolet sunlight and preventing puddles from which the birds can drink contaminated water.**

Examples of draining material, which can also help to clean birds' feet, include stones, bark, slats/mesh, which do not have the potential to damage or trap the birds' feet. The relevant distance from the popholes in which to maintain this area will depend on the individual unit, but as a guide should be at least 3m.

Evidence also suggests that good vegetation cover outside the popholes can help to encourage hens out on to the range. This should be taken into careful consideration when managing the pophole area and natural vegetation cover should be in place as close as possible to the house.

Appropriate drainage from the roof and amount of overhang should also be considered, as well as the use of verandas/wintergardens. In addition, shade/shelter, natural cover and range enrichment should be distributed throughout the range in a way to help attract birds away from the popholes and to use the whole of the outside area.

- R 1.6** The perimeter of the range must be within 350m from the house.

i **To help to maintain the correct number of birds housed inside in each colony, the range area should be divided between different colonies of birds to at least a 50m distance from the house.**

i **Due consideration should be given to how the shape of the range could affect how evenly the hens use the total range area. For example, access to a wide, rather than narrow, range area may help to manage range quality directly outside the popholes. As a guide, housing should not be any closer than 50m to the range boundaries on more than two sides of the house.**

- R 1.7** Where there is a risk of build up of parasites or disease on free-range land, rotational grazing or other disease control measures must be applied.

- R 1.8** Action must be taken as necessary to address areas with heavily contaminated soil before new birds arrive.

- R 1.9** A plan for regular worming must be drawn up within the Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan (VHWP) (see H 1.1) and carried out on the basis of previous experience, results of regular monitoring and discussion with the attending veterinarian.

i **Birds can become infected by picking up worm eggs, which thrive in warm, moist conditions and can be a particular problem in spring and summer, from grass, soil or faeces. Worming should be carried out as regularly as necessary to avoid subsequent build-up and to help break the cycle of infection. Worm burdens should be regularly monitored by examination of faeces, culled birds, or worm egg counts on bulk faeces.**

Shade/shelter

- R 2.1** Shade/shelter must:
- be provided at an area of at least 8m² per 1,000 birds
 - be available at all times from when the hens first have access to the range
 - offer adequate protection from inclement weather and overhead predators
 - be available from a distance of no more than 20m from the popholes
 - be distributed appropriately to encourage full range use
 - be of sound construction, secure and not pose any welfare risks, including injury, to the birds.

i Calculation of overhead shade/shelter area referred to in R 2.1 is based on the actual amount of cover provided underneath. For example, hedgerows may be included if they can provide shade at all times of day and there is enough room underneath for hen access. Where trees are deciduous or immature, supplementary shelters will need to be provided during the period in which they cannot provide sufficient cover. Trailers and simple constructions of four downward posts with a solid roof can provide acceptable forms of artificial shelter providing they can satisfy all the requirements of R 2.1.

Popholes

- R 3.1 *** Popholes must be opened, unless bad weather or veterinary advice dictates otherwise:
- no later than 12pm for birds aged under 21 weeks
 - no later than 9am for birds aged 21 weeks and older.
- R 3.1.1 *** Popholes must be closed:
- no earlier than at the time at which artificial lights are being turned off inside the house for birds aged under 21 weeks
 - at dusk for birds aged 21 weeks and older.

***** **i** If it is necessary to restrict access to the range while the birds are learning to use the nest boxes inside, R 3.1 a) applies and producers should aim to make the opening time gradually earlier as the birds approach 21 weeks, when R 3.1 b) applies.

Allowing hens access to the range before the onset of lay rather than once they are in lay has been shown to increase ranging behaviour.

- R 3.2** Each pophole must be at least 45cm high and 2m wide to allow the passage of more than one hen at a time.
- R 3.3** There must be at least 1 pophole per 600 birds, except where popholes are wider than 2m in which case the total length of available popholes may be used in calculations of pophole requirements for a house.

R 3.4 Where the visual contact between hen and popholes is impeded in any way (for example where access from inside the house is up an incline) pophole height must be increased in order that sight of the range is never obstructed by other hens.

i Where necessary, the height increase required by R 3.4 can be attained with mesh or similar material which allows more light to enter the house. Where the pophole height is above ground level, ramps should be provided to aid birds entering and leaving the house.

R 3.5 The arrangement of popholes must be such that they are evenly distributed along the line of access to ensure that all hens have ready access to the range.

R 3.6 For flocks/colonies of birds with 1,200 birds or fewer, the following applies (for flocks of 1,201 birds and above, see R 3.2 and R 3.3):

- a) there must be a minimum of 2 popholes
- b) popholes must be at least 50cm wide and 45cm high
- c)

Number of birds	Minimum total pophole length (metres)
Up to 300 birds	1.0
301 to 600 bird	1.5
601 to 900 birds	2.0
901 to 1,200 birds	2.5

R 3.7 Where verandas are attached to the side of the house, the popholes on both the house and the veranda must be of the size and ratio stated in R 3.2, R 3.3 and R 3.6.

i The distribution of popholes may be staggered to maintain the thermal environment inside the house.

R 3.8 The maximum distance travelled by a hen to reach the nearest pophole onto the range must not exceed 20m.

R 3.9 * No wire, electric or otherwise, is permitted under the popholes.

Stocking density

R 4.1 * For birds aged 21 weeks and older, stocking density must not exceed:

- a) 2,000 hens per hectare over the life of the flock
- b) 2,500 hens per hectare at any one time.

i The maximum stocking density over the life of the flock (R 4.1 a)) should relate to the total amount of range available to the birds. Access to some of this area can be temporarily restricted in order to rest the land to help maintain the quality of the range, as long as R 4.1 b) is never exceeded. Some producers may require a larger overall range area (and hence a lower stocking density over the life of the flock) in order to manage and rotate range areas effectively. This should be carefully considered including factors such as local weather and land conditions.

R 4.2 * For birds aged under 21 weeks the range area must provide at least 1m² per bird at all times.

* **i** Producers should note that European egg marketing regulations (EC 589/2008) apply once eggs are being marketed as free-range.

* **Natural cover and enrichment**

R 5.1 * Natural cover must be present in the form of existing or newly planted trees/shrubs/other at an area equal to at least 5% of the total range area (this may include natural cover meeting the requirements of R 2.1):

- a) if stocking at over 1,000 and up to 2,000 hens/ha over the life of the flock
- b) from 1st October 2014 for all flocks.

* **i** Research and experience shows that natural cover, particularly trees, can help encourage birds to use the range, which in turn can help in range quality management. Natural cover may include trees, shrubs and semi-permanent vegetation that can easily be established and removed, such as artichoke and kale. A well-managed range should include a variety of different types of natural cover and areas of interest for hens. Wide open spaces should be avoided, and moveable artificial shelters, enriched areas (see R 4.3) and newly planted areas should be positioned to help achieve an appropriate distribution of elements to encourage birds out to all areas of the range.

The requirements of R 4.2 differ to those of R 2.1 in that 'natural cover' focuses on enrichment of the range, while 'shade and shelter' must offer actual overhead protection at all times. For any newly planted natural cover, the area that the vegetation is expected to cover when mature will be taken into account for calculating compliance. For example, when mature, trees may cover an average area of 3m x 3m.

R 5.2 If stocking at over 1,000 and up to 2,000 hens/ha over the life of the flock, additional facilities, or designated existing natural elements, must be provided for dustbathing/perching/foraging or a combination of these behaviours:

- a) in at least 1 area per 2,000 birds
- b) in a total of at least 2 areas.

R 5.2.1 * For all flocks from 1st October 2014 additional facilities, or designated existing natural elements, must be provided for dustbathing/perching/foraging or a combination of these behaviours (up to 30th September 2014 see R 5.2 for requirements):

- a) in at least 1 area per 2,000 birds
- b) in a total of at least 2 areas.

i Well managed and positioned brushings from trees, perches and designated covered sand areas are examples of facilities which can help to provide extra opportunity for hens to carry out dustbathing, perching and foraging (see R 5.2) and can help to encourage the whole range area to be used.

Biosecurity

- i** Consideration should be given to the potential disease risk posed by wild birds, for example, when choosing where to site a new unit.

Wintergardens/verandas which allow access to natural light and fresh air, can be beneficial particularly in the eventuality that access to the range is restricted on veterinary or legal advice.

Management

A high degree of caring and responsible management and stockmanship is vital to ensure good animal welfare. Managers and stock-keepers need to be thoroughly trained, skilled and competent in animal husbandry and welfare, and have a good working knowledge of their system and the livestock under their care.

- M 1.0** All records and other documentation that the '*RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens*' require the producer to keep and maintain, must be made available to the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer.

Managers

- M 1.1** Managers must ensure that all stock-keepers:
- have access to a copy of the current version of the '*RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens*'
 - are familiar with its content
 - understand and apply its content in their specific areas of responsibility.
- M 1.2** Managers must ensure that pullets are raised to the standards as set out in the '*RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)*'.
- M 1.3** Managers must ensure that:
- the names of all staff employed who are responsible for the welfare of the birds are identified
 - all stock-keepers have completed relevant and adequate training (including any in-house training) prior to being given responsibility for the welfare of birds and can satisfy the Freedom Food Assessor and RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer of their competence in practical circumstances.
- M 1.4** Records relating to M 1.3 must be kept.

i Where possible, stock-keeper training should be validated.

- M 1.5** Managers must:
- develop and implement plans and precautions to prevent/cope with emergencies such as fire, flood, storm damage, break down of environmental control or interruption of supplies, e.g. food, water, electricity
 - provide an emergency action board sited in a prominent position, which must include:
 - the procedures to be followed by those discovering such an emergency
 - the location of water sources for use by the fire brigade
 - an 8 digit map grid reference and postcode for the location of the unit
 - develop and implement a biosecurity plan to minimise the risk of introducing disease onto a site.

- M 1.6** Managers must maintain records of production data, which include documentation on:
- incoming and outgoing stock, including number of birds placed in each house
 - the number of ill, injured or dead birds identified after each inspection (causes of illness and injury and, where identified, the cause of death, must be stated)
 - the number culled (including reason for culling)
 - feed consumption
 - water consumption
 - maximum and minimum temperatures
 - ventilation (including settings and any necessary changes).

i if possible, water meters should be fitted in each hen house.

- M 1.7** Records relating to inspection (M 1.6 b) and c)) must be dated and signed, with the time of inspection noted.

Stock-keepers

- M 2.1** Stock-keepers must:
- be able to recognise signs of good health and welfare, including normal behaviour
 - be able to recognise a potential welfare problem in its earliest stages
 - be able to recognise the early stages of common diseases
 - know the appropriate actions for treatment of common diseases/ill health
 - be able to cull hens when necessary.
- M 2.2** When an outbreak of abnormal behaviour occurs, it must be tackled immediately by appropriate changes in the system of management.

Inspection


- M 3.1** All hens must be inspected at least 3 times a day in order to identify any birds which are sick, injured or behaving abnormally.

i Inspections should be appropriately spaced throughout the day, i.e. morning, midday and afternoon/evening.

- M 3.1.1 *** Nest boxes must be inspected at least once daily.
- M 3.2** The records of inspection (see M 3.1) must be dated, signed and the time of inspection noted.
- M 3.3** Any welfare problems seen during an inspection by the producer must be dealt with appropriately and without delay.

i Welfare problems of sufficient severity that they should have been noticed on previous inspections and dealt with, shall be taken by the Freedom Food Assessor or RSPCA Farm Livestock Officer as evidence of negligence of duties by the stock-keeper.

- M 3.4** Work routines and practices must be designed to ensure that hens do not become fearful and are not frightened in avoidable ways.

*  **Frequent flock inspections and varying the routine, people, numbers of people and clothing, as well as increased inspections immediately after housing, has been shown to help to reduce fearfulness in hens, which in turn can help to minimise the risk of injurious feather pecking.**

- M 3.5** All movement throughout the unit must be slow and deliberate, both to alleviate fear and reduce possible injury to birds.

- M 3.6** Hens must at all times be handled in a careful, positive and compassionate manner.

Equipment

- M 4.1** Stock-keepers must inspect the equipment, including the automatic equipment, upon which laying hens depend at least once daily to check that there are no defects.

- M 4.2** Where a defect relating to M 4.1 is found (whether on inspection or at any other time):

- a) the defect must be rectified immediately
- b) if this is impracticable, such measures as are required to safeguard the hens from suffering unnecessary pain or distress as a result of the defect, must immediately be taken and maintained until the defect is rectified.

- M 4.3** Where the automatic equipment includes a ventilation system, the system must contain:


- a) an alarm which will give adequate warning of the failure of that system to function properly (the alarm must operate even if the principal electricity supply to it has failed)
- b) additional equipment or means of ventilation (whether automatic or not) which, in the event of such a failure of the ventilation system, will provide adequate ventilation so as to prevent the birds from suffering unnecessary distress as a result of the failure.

- M 4.4** For existing or new equipment which is used in management, e.g. heaters, lighting, ventilation (flaps/fans), stock-keepers must be able to:

- a) demonstrate an ability to operate the equipment competently
- b) demonstrate the ability to carry out routine maintenance
- c) recognise common signs of malfunction
- d) demonstrate knowledge of action to be carried out in event of malfunction.


Protection from other animals

- M 5.0 *** A written Wild Animal Control plan (including the range area in the case of free-range units) must be in place.

*  **The RSPCA is opposed to the use of poisons that cause animal suffering.**

The RSPCA is concerned about the welfare of all animals that have the capacity to suffer, and therefore consideration and use of alternatives to baiting is encouraged.


- M 5.1 *** Humane precautions must be taken to protect laying hens from other animals that could cause them harm, including bringing in disease.
- M 5.2** The intrusion of wild birds into barn units must be prevented with netting or similar material over roof ventilation ducts, windows, etc.
- M 5.3** Other animals, e.g. dogs and cats, must not be permitted in the hen house.
- M 5.4** Managers must:
- have access to a copy of the 'Code of practice for the prevention and control of rodent infestations on poultry farms' (Defra, 2009, PB 13233)
 - be familiar with its content
 - implement the recommendations as appropriate.
- M 5.5 *** When developing and implementing Wild Animal Control plans (see M 5.0), physical exclusion methods, and the removal of elements in the vicinity of the hens that might encourage the presence of wild animals (see information box below), must be included.

- *  **Methods of physical exclusion and discouragement of wild animals include:**
- **construction/maintenance of fencing appropriate for excluding the animals in question**
 - **removal of shelter/cover (e.g. weeds) in the area surrounding livestock buildings**
 - **removal/protection of obvious food sources**
 - **maintenance/proofing of buildings.**

- M 5.6 *** The Wild Animal Control plan (see M 5.0) must specifically prohibit the snaring and gassing of animals.
- M 5.7** Managers must:
- have access to a copy of the 'Code of practice for using plant protection products' (Defra, 2006, PB 11090) [this code replaces the 'Code of Practice for the Safe Use of Pesticides on Farms and Holdings']
 - be familiar with its content
 - implement the recommendations as appropriate.

Pullets

* PLEASE ALSO REFER TO THE RSPCA WELFARE STANDARDS FOR PULLETS (LAYING HENS).


*  It is strongly advised to liaise closely with the rearer and visit the pullets.

Producers are advised to look for single-breed, established flocks of calm, robust pullets and to ensure that the environment and types of facilities in the rearing and laying unit are as closely matched as possible. This can include floor, perch and litter type, lighting and feeding times, temperature at the time of placement and access outside if possible for free-range. Pullets should also be in good health, at target bodyweight and uniform in size.

All of these elements can help the birds adjust on arrival at the laying hen house and to minimise stress. This has been shown to help reduce the risk of injurious feather pecking occurring later in the birds' life.

M 6.1 All pullets destined for a Freedom Food approved multi-tier laying unit must be sourced from a Freedom Food approved multi-tier rearing unit.

M 6.2 All pullets destined for a Freedom Food approved laying unit must be sourced from a Freedom Food approved rearing unit.

*  It is strongly recommended that all pullets required for single tier laying houses are sourced from rearing houses that provide some slatted areas and facilities on different levels. Evidence and experience suggests that this can result in birds that more quickly settle in to their laying environment, more easily use and access facilities on a raised slatted area and roost on the slatted/perching areas at night. This in turn can help to minimise any stress.

M 6.3 All pullets sourced from a free-range rearing unit must be transferred to a free-range laying unit.

Broody hens

M 7.1 Broody hens, which are temporarily separated from the rest of the flock in a pen, may be kept on the slats but must be:


- a) kept in conditions that comply with the rest of the RSPCA welfare standards
- b) included in records stating date separated from flock and planned date for return.

The environment in which livestock are housed needs to be conducive to good health.

* **Health and welfare monitoring**

- H 1.1 *** Managers must develop a written Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan (VHWP), which must:
- a) be implemented, reviewed and updated in conjunction with the attending veterinary surgeon
 - i) at least annually for multi flock sites
 - ii) at least once per flock for single flock sites
 - b) be signed and dated by the attending veterinary surgeon
 - c) set targets for health aspects
 - d) record whether targets have been met each year and at each assessment made by the veterinary surgeon
 - e) include tolerance limits for flock performance
 - f) contain a salmonella control programme.

- H 1.2 *** Records relating to H 1.1 must be kept.

* ** The VHWP (see H 1.1) should be aimed at reducing the risk of disease challenges and maximising the health and welfare of each flock. Accurate and up to date records, agreed tolerance levels for areas of health and production, and appropriate action plans included in the VHWP should enable any potential problems to be detected and managed at the earliest opportunity.**

Reviewing records, at the end of each flock at least, allows the effectiveness of any actions taken to be assessed and the VHWP to be updated where relevant to help safeguard the health and welfare of the next flock.

RSPCA guidance notes which can be used as a basis for a Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan for laying hens and pullets, are available at www.rspca.org.uk/welfarestandards or from the RSPCA farm animals department.

- H 1.3** If any flock performance parameters fall below the tolerance limits identified in the VHWP (see H 1.1):
- a) the veterinary surgeon must be informed
 - b) the VHWP must be revised to include a programme of action which will remedy the problem.

- H 1.4** Managers must:
- a) have access to copies of:
 - i) *'A Guide to the National Control Programme for Salmonella in laying flocks'* (Defra, 2009, PB 13204)
 - ii) *'Code of Practice for the Control of Salmonella during the Production, Storage and Transport of Compound Feeds, Premixtures, Feed Materials and Feed Additive'* (Defra, 2009, PB 13303)
 - b) be familiar with their content
 - c) implement the recommendations as appropriate.

- H 1.5** There must be no recurring injuries of a similar nature seen on a number of birds attributable to physical features of their environment or handling procedures.

H 1.6 If recurring injuries are found, a programme of preventative action must be specified in the VHWP (see H 1.1).

i **Recurring injuries are those seen on a number of birds, with sufficient similarity to suggest they have a common cause. Injury is described as damage severe enough for the formation of granular scar tissue or defective bones or joints, and to an extent significantly greater than would be caused by accidental bumps or scratches.**

H 1.7 * Egg peritonitis, cannibalism and red mite must all be identified within the VHWP, including plans to avoid, control and minimise any problems.

H 1.8 Ailing hens, and any hen suffering from injury such as open wounds or fractures, or from prolapse of the vent must be:

- a) segregated
- b) treated without delay
- c) if necessary, be humanely killed.

H 1.9 Hens must not be induced to moult.

H 1.10 * The level of feather loss within the flock must be assessed:

- a) on at least a monthly basis
- b) using a method which clearly differentiates between at least 3 levels of feather loss
- c) using a method which provides consistent results within and between observers
- d) and recorded.

* **i** **To assess feather loss it is recommended to follow this protocol:**

Visually assess (without handling) and score 5 birds in 10 different areas of the house/range (a total of 50 birds).

Score separately for the:

- **back/vent (generally associated with injurious feather pecking)**
- **head/neck (can be aggression or equipment damage)**

Score 0 = no/minimal feather loss

No bare skin visible, no or slight wear, only single feathers missing

Score 1 = slight feather loss

Moderate wear, damaged feathers or 2 or more adjacent feathers missing, bare skin visible up to 5cm in dimension

Score 2 = moderate/severe feather loss

Bare skin visible at more than 5cm maximum dimension

See www.assurewel.org.uk for more information and for score sheets available to download.

H 1.11 * If any feather loss occurs:

- a) immediate action must be taken to alleviate the problem including consideration of the measures outlined in the information box below
- b) the VHWP (see H 1.1) must be reviewed at this time and action intended to alleviate the feather loss problem must be identified
- c) these actions must be regularly reviewed with the intention of improving the feather cover of the birds.

*

**Measures that should be considered if feather loss occurs:**

- investigate potential causes and risk factors
- implement appropriate changes in management and/or environment depending on the suspected cause, e.g. feather loss due to injurious feather pecking is believed to be redirected foraging behaviour, which can be triggered by stress, so increase foraging opportunities immediately (see standard E 10.1 for more information)
- refer to the 'Feather Cover Advice Guide' leaflet, available from the RSPCA
- be familiar with the contents of FeatherWel's 'Improving Feather Cover - a guide to reducing the risk of injurious pecking occurring in non-cage laying hens' and implement recommendations as appropriate
- visit www.featherwel.org and www.assurewel.org for further advice
- talk to your vet.

Such action may help prevent the problem from getting worse and hopefully lead to improved feather cover.

- * **i** The RSPCA believes it is very important to know what effect resource standards, such as those in this document, are having on the welfare of laying hens. To help measure this, the RSPCA has been involved in the development of a practical, reliable and useful method of on-farm welfare outcome assessment as part of the AssureWel project.

The following key welfare indicators for hens, looking at their health, behaviour and physical condition, are now assessed on all Freedom Food approved laying hen farms:

- feather loss
- bird dirtiness
- beak trimming
- antagonistic behaviours
- flightiness
- birds requiring further care
- mortality.

These measures help gain a more accurate picture of the quality of life from the animals' point of view, which in turn can help to highlight areas of best practice and areas where welfare needs to be improved. It also helps to inform future development of the RSPCA welfare standards.

Freedom Food assessors and RSPCA farm livestock officers use welfare outcome assessment as objective evidence when checking compliance with RSPCA welfare standards. Results are fed back to producers and benchmarking data is also provided so producers can see how they compare with others.

As part of the VHWP, to help monitor the birds' health and welfare, producers should consider regular self-assessment of those measures not already covered in the standards – in particular bird dirtiness, antagonistic behaviours and flightiness. See www.assurewel.org or full assessment protocols for all welfare outcome assessment measures.

The AssureWel project provides further advice and support to producers and producer groups. Please contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department or see www.assurewel.org for more information.

- * **i** Regular weighing throughout the hens' lives helps in overall flock health and welfare assessment. It is highly recommended to weigh a number of hens at least weekly until 30 weeks of age and then at least every 4 weeks to assess progress and evenness. As a guide, 25 birds from different areas should be weighed in each colony of 4,000 hens.

- H 1.12** * Levels of mortality above 0.2% within the first two weeks at the laying unit must be:
- a) the subject of investigation, and
 - b) the results of which must be recorded.

- H 1.13 *** In relation to H 1.12, where records have identified higher levels of mortality, prompt action must be taken to prevent further deaths, injury or suffering occurring.

- * **i** The RSPCA is very concerned about the incidence of bone fractures in laying hens, which research has shown can be high in all systems. Such damage can be the result of elements including osteoporosis, design and management of the housing system and handling of the birds, including during depopulation. Keel bones are particularly susceptible to damage.

The Farm Animal Welfare Committee's (FAWC) *Opinion on Osteoporosis and Bone Fractures in Laying Hens (2010)* identified that improvements to bone strength should be made through nutrition, breeding and enabling birds to exercise safely. FAWC also stressed the need for careful handling at depopulation and consideration of alternative methods of on-farm killing.

All producers should be aware of these concerns and consider how to reduce the risk of bone damage and any associated suffering. The RSPCA will respond further to this issue within the standards as soon as new advice and evidence is available.

- * **i** Producing larger eggs has the potential to cause stress and pain to hens. It can lead to feather loss, prolapse of the vent or oviduct and cannibalism.

Producers should refer to standard breed performance targets and expert breed, nutrition and veterinary advice. In general, lighting patterns and energy content of the feed can affect egg size. It is advisable to achieve an even body weight of birds across the flock to help ensure the energy content is appropriate for all individual birds.

* **Beak trimming**

- H 2.1** Where chicks are beak trimmed, this procedure must only be carried out on chicks no older than 24 hours using infrared equipment (see '*RSPCA welfare standards for hatcheries*'), unless in accordance with H 2.4.

- i** The RSPCA is working towards phasing out beak trimming for laying hens by 2016 at the latest, or sooner if this becomes possible. The 2016 date has also been proposed by Defra for a legal ban of the procedure¹. The Society will continue to work closely with the industry to help meet this goal, to include consideration of all relevant research and practical aspects of laying hen and pullet rearing, nutrition and breeding.

In the meantime, where it is deemed necessary to minimise the risk of injurious pecking and cannibalism, infrared trimming of chicks is the only legally permitted method (except in emergency situations for older birds). 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.

Producers should adopt appropriate management, husbandry and enrichment techniques with a view to minimising the risk of injurious pecking and removing the need to beak trim. In addition, rearing conditions should be made as similar to the laying unit to minimise any stress during transfer and consideration should be given to the suitability of breed types.

¹HC Deb 8 Nov 2010 : Col. 3WS

- H 2.2 *** Any concerns about the trimmed beaks of hens (for example, the amount of beak trimmed) where it has been carried out at the hatchery, must be discussed with the relevant hatchery and evidence of this recorded.
- H 2.3** Managers must:
- have access to a copy of 'A guide to the practical management of feather pecking and cannibalism in free range laying hens' (Defra, PB 10596, 2005)
 - be familiar with its content
 - implement the recommendations as appropriate.
- H 2.4** If, in emergency circumstances as permitted by law, and as a last resort (having tried alternative approaches such as changes in management, environment etc.) and only on veterinary advice, beak trimming of birds older than 24 hours is deemed necessary for welfare reasons, then the producer must:
- obtain a signed letter from the vet stating the reasons for advising that beak trimming be undertaken, and details of other approaches tried prior to beak trimming
 - inform the RSPCA Farm Animals Department in writing with a copy of the letter referred to in a).
- H 2.5** The beak trimming procedure, in relation to H 2.4, must include the following:
- appropriate equipment installed in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions
 - trained and competent operators
 - removal of only the minimum amount of beak and never more than one third
 - initial checks of the accuracy and uniformity of beak trimming based on observations of at least 100 birds per operator
 - on-going hourly checks of bird welfare and beak condition throughout the procedure
 - careful examination and, if necessary, humane culling of any bird found to have been beak trimmed incorrectly
 - cauterisation of the beak to minimise the risk of haemorrhage when using hot-blade equipment
 - records of the names of all personnel carrying out beak trimming
 - signature of the nominated person in charge of the procedure.
- H 2.6** Producers and those responsible for carrying out the beak trimming procedure in relation to H 2.4 must:
- have access to a copy of the 'BEIC Code of Best Practice for beak trimming' (March 2004)
 - be familiar with its content
 - implement the recommendations as appropriate.
- H 2.7** For at least one month following beak trimming, in relation to H 2.4, the farm manager must carry out and record specific inspections to check the welfare of the birds and beak condition.
- H 2.8** Artificial devices (e.g. blinkers attached to the beak or nostrils, and contact lenses) must not be used.

* Medication

- H 3.1** Written procedures must be in place, and must be followed at all times, for the safe disposal of pharmaceutical waste, needles and other sharps.
- H 3.2** Procedures relating to H 3.1 must be in strict accordance with the relevant waste disposal regulations.
- H 3.3 *** Medicines must be:
- a) used only under the direction of a veterinary surgeon
 - b) clearly labelled and stored in accordance with the label instructions
 - c) kept in a secure, lockable store which is:
 - i) safe from animals, children and birds
 - ii) separate from food producing areas or food source areas
 - d) legal for use in the UK
 - e) administered in accordance with UK and EU legislation.
- H 3.4** A nominated person must:
- a) be responsible for the management of the medicine store
 - b) keep appropriate records for stock control purposes.

i It is recommended that producers obtain, read and where appropriate, apply the advice contained within the latest version of:

- a) '*Guidelines on Responsible Use of Antimicrobials in Poultry Production*', issued by the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance (RUMA, Acorn House, 25 Mardley Hill, Welwyn, Hertfordshire, AL6 0TT; www.ruma.org.uk)
- b) '*Code of practice on the responsible use of animal medicines on the farm*', issued by the Veterinary Medicine Directorate
- c) '*Veterinary Medicines: safe use by farmers and other handlers*', issued by the Health and Safety Executive.

- H 3.5** All personnel involved in the administration of animal medicines must be competent to do so.
- H 3.6 *** Records must be kept of all administered medications.

* Biosecurity

- i** An effective biosecurity policy should aim to prevent the introduction of disease and parasites on to the farm and subsequently to prevent the spread within the farm. Disease agents can be introduced by birds, people, equipment and vehicles.

Disease and other health challenges can cause significant stress to birds, which in turn can also lead to an increased risk of injurious feather pecking. To help address this, best practice in biosecurity procedures is essential.

- H 4.1 *** A record of all visitors to the farm must be maintained.

- H 4.2 *** The record (see H 4.1) must include the following details of the visitor:
- name
 - organisation
 - date and time of arrival
 - recent visits to poultry sites and farms
 - certification that they are not suffering with any enteric illness.
- H 4.3 *** Protective clothing and footwear/overshoes must be:
- worn by all visitors
 - either washed, house/site dedicated or used once if disposable.
- H 4.4 *** On each occasion on entering/leaving a poultry house, all farm personnel and visitors must dip footwear.
- H 4.5 *** Foot dip must:
- consist of Defra approved disinfectants
 - use disinfectants in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions
 - be replaced with fresh solution regularly.

*  **Producers should contact Defra for information on Defra approved disinfectants. Contact details can be found on the Defra website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs**


- H 4.6 *** The house must operate a period free of all livestock between flock cycles.


Casualty killing/slaughter

- H 5.1** Each farm must have provisions for the humane killing/slaughter – without delay – of casualty hens.

- H 5.1.1** Casualty killing/slaughter must be carried out by either:

- a named, trained, competent member of staff, or
- a licensed slaughterman, or
- a veterinary surgeon.

 **It is not illegal to slaughter/kill a bird to prevent further severe suffering if a method of humane slaughter/killing is available on the premises and there is someone competent to undertake the procedure.**

 **The Humane Slaughter Association (HSA) has produced a booklet entitled '*Practical Slaughter of Poultry: A Guide for the Small Producer*'. Producers should obtain a copy of this booklet, from HSA, The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead, Herts AL4 8AN.**

H 5.2 Only those methods of on-farm slaughter/killing recommended by the HSA are permitted:

- a) hand-held electrical stunning, immediately followed by neck cutting
- b) neck dislocation
- c) captive-bolt.

i In accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009, no person shall kill by manual cervical dislocation or percussive blow to the head more than 70 animals per day.

H 5.3 Equipment that crushes the neck, including killing pliers, must not be used.

i Equipment that crushes the neck is neither quick nor humane.

H 5.4 If there is any doubt as to how to proceed, the veterinary surgeon must be called at an early stage to advise whether treatment is possible or whether humane slaughter is required to prevent suffering.

H 5.5 If a bird is in severe pain that is uncontrollable, then the bird must be promptly, humanely slaughtered/killed.

H 5.6 All carcasses must be disposed of strictly according to current legislation.

H 5.7 A record must be kept of how and where all such carcasses are disposed of.

Transport

The depopulation process and transport systems needs to be designed and managed to ensure livestock are not caused unnecessary distress or discomfort. The transport and handling of livestock needs to be kept to an absolute minimum. Personnel involved in depopulation and transport need to be thoroughly trained and competent to carry out the tasks required of them.

Depopulation

i It is a legal requirement for all free-range birds to have access to the range on a daily basis, including during the day before depopulation.

i For clarification, throughout this section the responsibilities of key staff involved in depopulation are defined as follows:

Producer/farm manager (or named supervisor) – ultimately responsible for the welfare of the birds, until they are loaded into the transport modules/crates.

Catching team leader – responsible for supervising the catching process, making sure all catching team members are aware of their duties and are competent to carry them out.

Senior catching team members – experienced senior members of the catching team, appointed by the catching team leader, to help supervise the other members of the catching team.

Haulier (driver) – responsible for making sure all birds are fit to travel and for the welfare of birds from the time they are placed into the transport modules/crates until they are unloaded from the modules/crates at the abattoir.

T 1.1 The producer/farm manager must ensure that only Freedom Food approved catching teams are used for catching laying hens at depopulation.

i The producer/farm manager may be Freedom Food approved themselves if organising their own team for depopulation.

T 1.2 A depopulation action plan (DAP) must:

- a) be drawn up by the producer/farm manager for each house prior to depopulation
- b) be reviewed and signed after each depopulation by both the producer/farm manager or named supervisor, and the catching team leader.

T 1.3 The DAP (see T 1.2) must include:

- a) building design
- b) catching plan
- c) transport arrangements
- d) post-depopulation records.

(For more detailed information, see Appendix 2 for pro forma.)

i **Producers/farm managers should consider the construction of buildings and bear in mind the access to and from the area where birds are placed and removed. Particular attention should be paid to the width of doors and access to mobile units.**

All new buildings should have access for transport crates so that hens can be loaded inside the building, or a concrete area with shelter outside the unit should be provided. It is appreciated that this may be more difficult in some smaller and/or mobile units, but every effort should be made to ensure the welfare of the hens at the time of loading into transport crates.

T 1.4 If the catching team has concerns regarding the depopulation process and the welfare of the birds, the catching team leader must raise these concerns with the producer/farm manager.

T 1.5 If the producer/farm manager, or named supervisor, has concerns regarding the welfare of hens during the catching process, he/she must raise these concerns with the catching team leader.

T 1.6 The DAP (see T 1.2) must:

- a) include any bird welfare issues raised by the catching team (see T 1.4)
- b) include any bird welfare issues raised by the producer/farm manager (see T 1.5)
- c) include any action to be taken to address the issues raised in a) and b) prior to the next depopulation.

T 1.7 The producer/farm manager must:

- a) provide full written instructions of the catching plan to the catching team leader and senior catching team members (see T 1.8 d))
- b) take responsibility to ensure the welfare of the birds throughout the catching process
- c) be recorded by name in the DAP (see T 1.2).

T 1.8 The catching team leader must:

- a) be recorded by name in the DAP (see T 1.2)
- b) ensure that all catching staff are aware of their duties
- c) take responsibility for supervising, monitoring and maintaining RSPCA welfare standards throughout the depopulation of the house and loading of hens into the transport modules/crates
- d) appoint a minimum of one senior member of the catching team for teams of up to eight members, and two senior members for teams of nine or more members
- e) record the name(s) of the senior catching team members in the DAP.

T 1.9 The catching team leader and senior members of the catching team must:

- a) have access to a copy of the current version of the '*RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens*'
- b) be familiar with the contents of the section on depopulation
- c) understand and apply the contents of the section on depopulation.

T 1.10 All personnel involved in the catching and transportation of hens must be:

- a) properly trained
- b) competent to carry out their duties.

i Where possible training relating to T 1.10 should be validated.

T 1.11 The catching team leader must ensure that he/she:

- a) has viewed the Humane Slaughter Association DVD '*Poultry Welfare – Taking Responsibility*'
- b) is familiar with its content in order to convey the relevant content to the catching team members
- c) conveys relevant areas of its content to the other catching team members.

i Where possible all members of the catching team should view the Humane Slaughter Association DVD '*Poultry Welfare – Taking Responsibility*'.

T 1.12 Less experienced members of the catching team must be closely supervised by a senior member of the catching team or the catching team leader.

T 1.13 Hens must have access to water up to the time that the catching team begins to catch the first birds.

T 1.14 Producers/farm managers must liaise with the haulier and abattoir to ensure that the timing of the depopulation process does not deprive any bird from food for more than 12 hours (including the period up to the time of slaughter).

T 1.15 Catching must take place in low or blue lighting when the hens are roosting naturally to minimise fear reactions.

i If blue lighting is unavailable, a dimmer switch can be used to create low lighting, to avoid potentially causing unnecessary stress to the birds by turning lights on and off.

T 1.16 Catching teams must never put speed of operation before hen welfare.

T 1.17 Adequate draught-free ventilation at hen height must be provided for uncaught hens up to the time of loading.

T 1.18 The catching and loading routine must involve at least two people, one catching the birds and the other opening and closing the drawers of the transport containers.

T 1.19 Hens must be caught individually by grasping both legs, just above the feet.

T 1.20 Hens must not be caught or carried by a single leg.

T 1.21 No more than 3 birds must be carried in one hand.

i Matching the number of birds carried by each catcher at any one time to multiples of the drawer stocking density can help in the efficient and smooth loading of the birds.

- T 1.22** If carried in groups, care must be taken to ensure birds can be held comfortably without distress or injury.
- T 1.23** Carrying distances must be kept to the minimum possible.
- T 1.24** Where crowding occurs, the house lights must be raised, the birds spread out calmly and quietly, then allowed to settle before catching is resumed.

i Penning the birds into smaller groups for catching may help to minimise smothering, which can sometimes be caused by crowding.

- T 1.25 *** Prior to depopulation, the catching team leader and senior members must have a detailed procedure, that they will employ to deal with loose birds in the house and/or outside in order to ensure the welfare of such birds.
- T 1.26** When modules are used for transport:
- the top drawer must be loaded first
 - each drawer must be closed carefully to ensure that the birds' heads, wings and legs are not trapped in any way.
- T 1.27** Birds which are visibly unfit (including those that are lame, fatigued, injured or ill) before loading must:
- not be transported
 - be humanely killed immediately, as soon as observed.
- T 1.28** The catching team leader or a senior member of the catching team must be nominated to be responsible for humane killing of birds that are deemed unfit for travel (casualty birds).
- T 1.29** The nominated person (see T 1.28) must be:
- trained and competent in carrying out humane killing
 - named in the DAP (see T 1.2).
- T 1.30** Producers/farm managers must have in place, and be able to demonstrate, procedures to protect birds from wetting and chilling during the depopulation process.

i The use of curtains, shelter facilities during catching and loading and minimising the carrying distance from the building to the vehicle can help to protect birds from wetting and chilling.

Transport

i Legislation requires all drivers to hold a certificate of competence demonstrating that they have undertaken appropriate training and can implement the skills and knowledge attained in relation to ensuring good welfare during the transport of livestock.

- T 2.1** Personnel in charge of hen transporters must:
- have completed an approved training course
 - be able to demonstrate their competence in handling hens when loading and unloading them and while in transit.

- T 2.1.1** The driver must:
- a) have access to a copy of the current version of the ‘RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens’
 - b) be familiar with the contents of the section related to transport
 - c) understand and apply the contents of the section related to transport where applicable.

- T 2.1.2** The haulier must ensure that:
- a) all birds are fit to travel
 - b) the welfare of birds is safeguarded from the time they are placed into the transport modules/crates until they are unloaded from the modules/crates at the abattoir.

i The driver of the vehicle has a legal responsibility to inspect the birds at the time of loading and should inspect the birds prior to catching and departing.

T 2.2 The timing of arrival of the catching team must be planned to minimise any unforeseen interruptions to the depopulation process.

T 2.2.1 All transport vehicles must be parked as near as possible to the house being depopulated.

- T 2.2.2** Transport containers for hens must be:
- a) clean
 - b) well maintained
 - c) free from sharp edges or protrusions which could cause injury or distress to the birds.

T 2.3 All transporters must have a livestock capacity document on board at all times.


i The livestock capacity document will give data on the size of the transporter and the calculated carrying capacity for different livestock species under different climatic conditions.

T 2.3.1 Birds which are wet prior to loading must not be loaded close to the inlets on the vehicle.

i The RSPCA endorses the concerns and recommendations highlighted in the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) report (2004) on the Welfare of Animals During Transport. In particular, this report highlights that when wetting occurs under cold conditions (i.e. 8°C or less), this will induce substantial degrees of hypothermia.

Wherever possible, end-of-lay hens should be carried on vehicles where the ventilation system is capable of maintaining the temperature within the transport container below 26°C accompanied by a relative humidity (RH) of less than 75%. The ventilation system design and vehicle curtaining should reflect these requirements. Particular care and consideration should be given to poorly feathered birds who are more susceptible to chilling.

T 2.4 All hauliers must have a written standard operating and emergency procedure to implement during transportation (see Appendix 1).

- T 2.5** All deaths and injuries during transport must be recorded and reported within 48 hours to:
- the haulier (driver)
 - the haulier company
 - the slaughterhouse poultry welfare officer
 - the farm manager
- before the next consignment from the same source is collected.
- T 2.6** An on-farm record must be maintained of all incidents relating to T 2.5 that occur during transit.
- T 2.7** Where causes of mortality or injury have been identified, prompt action must be taken to prevent further deaths, injury and suffering occurring.
- T 2.8** The time between the loading of the last hen to the time of arrival at the final destination must be less than 8 hours.
- T 2.9 *** The following applies to unloading of pullets at the laying hen site:
- all pullets must be unloaded immediately upon arrival both from the vehicle and from the crates/modules
 - where it is not possible to unload pullets immediately, a written plan must be available which details:
 - the situations when this may occur
 - the procedures which are designed to ensure the welfare of the pullets whilst they are on the vehicle or in the crates/modules within the house.
- T 2.10** Noise levels, from all sources, must be minimised during loading, transport and unloading.
- T 2.11** In periods of hot weather (in excess of 21°C), hens must be transported at night or in the coolest part of the day or the stocking density must be reduced by 20%.
- T 2.12** Hauliers must have in place, and be able to demonstrate, procedures to protect birds from extremes of weather (including wetting and chilling) at all times whilst hens are in modules, both prior to loading on to the vehicle and during transport.
-  **Parking the vehicle in an appropriate position can help to minimise any potential distress to the birds that could be caused by prevailing weather conditions.**
- T 2.13** Every effort must be made to ensure:
- journeys are completed without unnecessary delays
 - that drivers are aware of any potential traffic problems and plan their journey accordingly.
- T 2.14** The producer/farm manager supervising the catching and loading of birds must liaise closely with the abattoir to minimise the time birds spend waiting on the vehicle in the event of an unexpected delay during depopulation.
- T 2.14.1** The haulier must liaise directly with the abattoir to minimise the time birds spend waiting on the vehicle in the event of an unexpected delay during transport.

T 2.15 If it is necessary to keep birds on board a stationary vehicle, the driver must take action to avoid heat/cold stress to the birds.

 In hot weather (in excess of 21°C) one of the most effective ways of achieving adequate ventilation is to keep the vehicle moving.

T 2.16 There must be adequate ventilation for all birds when in transport crates and on the vehicle.

T 2.17 All birds must be transported by a Freedom Food-approved haulier.

Slaughter/killing

All slaughter/killing systems need to be designed and managed to ensure livestock are not caused unnecessary distress or discomfort. The pre-slaughter handling of livestock needs to be kept to an absolute minimum. Personnel involved in the slaughter need to be thoroughly trained and competent to carry out the tasks required of them.

i Where possible, controlled atmosphere killing systems should be used to kill the birds.

The RSPCA recognises the shortcomings of the electrical waterbath stunning process in terms of its actual and potential detrimental impacts on bird welfare. For example, it is necessary to handle, invert and hang live birds and use a constant voltage to stun the birds. The Society is considering the phasing-out of such systems and would therefore strongly encourage producers to adopt controlled atmosphere killing systems or seek modifications to their electrical waterbath systems to address the key areas of concern affecting bird welfare.

S 1.1 Hens must be slaughtered/killed as close as possible to the point of production.

S 1.2 Any novel system of slaughter/killing must be referred to the RSPCA Farm Animals Department for review and decision before it can be used by prospective/current Freedom Food scheme members.

Management and training

S 2.1 Managers must develop and implement an animal welfare policy which must include:

- a) written procedures with regard to maintaining animal welfare in the abattoir
- b) the responsibilities and duties of staff
- c) emergency procedures.

S 2.2 The animal welfare policy (see S 2.1) must be regularly reviewed and updated.

S 2.3 Managers must appoint at least one trained Poultry Welfare Officer (PWO), who is responsible for the implementation of the animal welfare policy.

i Where possible, the PWO should have attended a recognised, validated training course, for example Bristol University Poultry Welfare Officer Training programme.

S 2.4 Managers, in conjunction with the PWO, must:

- a) develop and implement a training programme for all staff handling and slaughtering birds
- b) ensure that staff are properly trained to carry out their duties and be competent to perform them.

i Where possible, training relating to S 2.4 should be validated.

S 2.5 The PWO must make frequent checks throughout the day to ensure that birds are effectively stunned/killed and insensible throughout the slaughter operation.

- S 2.6** Where birds are not being effectively stunned, the PWO must take immediate remedial action.
- S 2.7** The manager and PWO must:
- have access to a copy of '*The Welfare of Poultry at Slaughter or Killing*' (Defra, 2007, or most current version)
 - be familiar with its content.
- S 2.8** PWOs must:
- be familiar with the content of the current Humane Slaughter Association's 'Best Practice Guidelines for the Welfare of Broilers and Hens in Processing Plants'
 - be familiar with the content of the Humane Slaughter Association 'Poultry Welfare – Taking Responsibility' DVD
 - convey the relevant content of the publications listed in a) and b) to other members of the slaughter team
 - ensure that the recommendations given in the publications listed in a) and b) are applied where appropriate.

i Where possible all members of the slaughter team should be familiar with the content of the publications listed in S 2.8 a) and b).

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)

i The use of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) in areas where live animals are present can assist those responsible for monitoring and enforcing animal welfare within the abattoir in ensuring that standards are maintained. It is strongly recommended that CCTV footage is also used for in-house training programmes and to provide an additional level of security at the abattoir.

- S(TV) 1.1** A functional CCTV system must be installed and operational to monitor animals undergoing the following processes at the abattoir (as applicable):
- unloading from vehicles into the lairage
 - shackling, including the shackling of birds following gas killing
 - stunning, including exiting the electrical waterbath
 - neck cutting
 - entering a Controlled Atmosphere System (CAS).
- S(TV) 1.2** CCTV cameras must be positioned to ensure a clear view of the processes being monitored is achieved at all times.
- S(TV) 1.3** It must be possible to observe clearly the view from each camera at all times via one or more monitors.
- S(TV) 1.4** CCTV footage must be recorded at all times where animals are undergoing any of the processes listed under standard S(TV) 1.1.

- S(TV) 1.5** The recorded CCTV footage must be:
- retained by the abattoir for a period of at least three months, and
 - available for viewing on site by Freedom Food field staff and RSPCA Farm Animals Department staff on request.

i Where possible it may be useful for managers to retain CCTV footage for longer than the three months specified in standard S(TV) 1.5, for their own monitoring and security purposes.

Lairage

- S 3.1** Where possible, hens must be unloaded immediately on arrival at the slaughterhouse and placed in an environmentally controlled lairage.
- S 3.2** All transport containers must be examined on arrival at the slaughterhouse to identify any birds suffering from injury, heat or cold stress.
- S 3.3** Any bird identified as suffering from injury, heat or cold stress must be killed immediately and humanely.
- S 3.4** Before the next consignment from the same source is collected, all deaths and injuries must be recorded and reported to:
- the driver
 - the haulier
 - the PWO
 - the farm manager.
- S 3.5** In the lairage where hens are held the following must be provided:
- protection from direct rays of sun and from adverse weather, i.e. wind, rain, hail, snow, etc.
 - adequate ventilation (temperature and humidity in the lairage must be regularly monitored and controlled)
 - be kept within their thermal comfort ('safe') zone, as indicated within the Defra sponsored document entitled '*Guide to Alleviation of Thermal Stress in Poultry in Lairage*' (PB 3724).
 - reduced or blue lighting.

i The temperatures shown within the '*Guide to Alleviation of Thermal Stress in Poultry in Lairage*' document are those measured within the module crate itself, which is approximately 9°C higher than the surrounding ambient temperature.

- S 3.5.1** There must be a contingency plan in place to state what action will be taken in the event of heat stress occurring.
- S 3.6** Where causes of mortality have been identified, prompt action must be taken to prevent further deaths, injury or suffering occurring.
- S 3.7** If transport mortality exceeds 0.5% on any individual journey:
- the level of mortality must be recorded
 - there must be an investigation to establish the cause/s of death, the outcome of which must be recorded
 - effective preventative measures must be put in place without delay to remedy the problem.

- S 3.8** Once hens have arrived at the premises at which they are intended to be slaughtered/killed, they must not be moved on to other premises for slaughter/killing.
- S 3.9** Standby equipment, for example a generator, must be available for emergency breakdowns.
- S 3.10** The lairage must be designed in order to minimise any distress caused to the birds.

i The design of the lairage should include aspects such as flooring. Uneven flooring can cause physical discomfort to birds when moving them through the lairage in modules.

- S 3.11** All birds must be slaughtered as soon as possible on arrival at the processing plant and in any case within 4 hours.

Shackling

- S 4.1** With the exception of the specific circumstances outlined in standard S 4.2, the shackling of conscious birds must be prohibited at the earliest opportunity and, in any case, by 1st January 2016 at the very latest.

i Processors are strongly encouraged to adopt systems that do not involve the shackling of conscious birds as soon as possible.

- S 4.2** From 1st January 2016, the shackling of conscious birds will only be permitted:

- a) Where:
- i) birds are slaughtered/killed on the farm where they were reared for finishing, and
 - ii) birds are not subjected to any transport by vehicle to the place of slaughter/killing, and
 - iii) the only commercially/practically viable option available is to slaughter/kill the birds using a system that requires shackling, and
 - iv) written permission has been sought from and granted by the RSPCA Farm Animals Department
- b) In the event of an emergency and when the most humane and only available alternative is to slaughter/kill the birds using a system that requires shackling.

i With respect to S 4.2 a), the RSPCA will phase out inverted shackling of conscious birds as soon as a commercially viable and more humane alternative method of slaughter/killing is available and suitable for use on-farm.

i For the purposes of S 4.2 b), emergency situations include: culling in the event of notifiable disease outbreaks; and, as a 'back-up' in the event of failure of the usual, permitted killing/slaughter system.

- S 4.3** Shackles must be of a size and type, and the slaughter line run at a speed, which permits hens to be hung on without causing unnecessary pain or distress.

- S 4.4** Shackling teams must be:
- thoroughly trained to handle the birds in such a way as to avoid injury and bone breakage
 - made fully aware of the risk of breakages that the hanging-on procedure can cause to hens
 - supervised by a trained and competent person during the shackling process.
- S 4.5** Slaughterhouse managers must ensure that sufficient personnel are employed on shackling lines at all times to ensure due care and diligence.
- S 4.6** The shackler must use a handling technique that calms the bird as it is being shackled.

i Gently running the hands down the legs and body of the bird after shackling has been shown to reduce the incidence of wing flapping. Keeping hold of the birds legs for 0.5 seconds after shackling has been reported to have a similar effect.

- S 4.7** Birds must be hung on by both legs.
- S 4.8** From the point of shackling to entry into the stun bath there must be:
- breast comforters to prevent wing flapping and birds raising their heads
 - reduction in noise level
 - maximum light level of 5 lux (to be measured at bird eye level)
 - there must be no unevenness in the line causing the shackles to jolt.

i The provision of a breast comforter and a reduction in noise and light levels all help to calm the bird and prevent it raising its head, vocalising and wing flapping, which can all be behavioural indicators of discomfort. Wing flapping can cause the occurrence of red wing tips which, as well as being a welfare issue, can result in downgrading of the carcass.

Breast comforters should be constructed from firm rubber or plastic curtain and extend below the eye level of the bird.

i There should be no bends in the shackle line from the point of shackling to entry into the stun bath.

- S 4.9** Care must be taken to ensure that birds
- cannot escape from the holding area
 - fall from the shackle line.
- S 4.10** Where loose birds are found, they must:
- be taken immediately to the hanging-on area, or,
 - if injured, immediately and humanely slaughtered/killed away from the line.

S 4.11 Hens must not be suspended for more than 30 seconds before they are stunned.

i Shackling a bird can cause discomfort and pain, so it is important to reduce the shackling period to a minimum. However, for an effective stun, it is necessary for the bird to be shackled for a short period, to allow it time to relax and stop wing flapping. Therefore, live chickens should not be suspended for more time than is necessary for wing flapping to cease, which has been shown to be around 15 seconds on average.

S 4.12 With respect to S 4.2 a), where the shackling of conscious birds is permitted on farm, birds must only be suspended for the shortest time necessary to undertake the killing/slaughter humanely and in any case for no more than 20 seconds before they are stunned.

S 4.13 All crates must be checked to ensure no hens are left inside them.

Stunning

S 5.1 Stunning equipment must be of one of the following types:

- a) electrically-live stunning bath
- b) dry stunner incorporating an electrically-live metal grid or bar
- c) hand operated stunner.

S 5.2 Unstunned birds must be screened from dead birds.

S 5.3 The line to the stunning bath must be darkened or lit with blue light.

S 5.4 Where an electrical stunning bath is used:

- a) the stunning bath must be set at a height appropriate for the size and number of birds
- b) the height must be set such that the heads of all birds are covered by the water
- c) it must deliver an average minimum current of 120mA per bird
- d) the current must never go below 105mA
- e) it must operate at a frequency of 50Hz with a sinusoidal (AC) waveform
- f) each bird must be in contact with the current for a minimum of 4 seconds
- g) the water level must be of sufficient depth to cover the heads of the birds
- h) the water must not overflow at the entrance to the bath
- i) the electrode which is immersed in the water must extend the length of the water bath
- j) it must be designed and set up to prevent birds receiving pre-stun shocks
- k) it must be fitted with an ammeter to accurately monitor current flow through the bath when loaded with birds.

i 50Hz sine wave (AC) is the optimum frequency and waveform for inducing cardiac arrest. The heart muscle is particularly sensitive to this frequency and when sufficient current is applied to the heart it ceases to beat normally and pump blood around the body. Therefore, an effective stun-to-kill can be achieved when using this frequency, which is the most preferred outcome to achieve good welfare during slaughter.

i A steeply inclined flat ramp bolted on to the entrance of the waterbath can be effective in avoiding pre-stun shocks. The ramp should extend over the water so the birds get drawn up the ramp by the shackle line and then swing down into the water in one smooth movement. This results in the bird's head and wing entering the water together and the bird is stunned immediately.

Care is needed to ensure birds do not receive pre-stun shocks from the ramp itself. This may occur if the ramp is electrically live because of water flowing from the bath onto the ramp, or if it is not isolated from the rest of the stunner.

Source: Humane Slaughter Association (HSA). 2006. *'HSA Technical Note 16: Prevention of Pre-Stun Shocks in Electrical Waterbaths'*. HSA, Wheathampstead, Herts., UK (www.hsa.org.uk).

i 1A = 1000mA. Therefore, 105mA = 0.105A.

S 5.4.1 * the shackle – at the point where it meets the hen's leg - must be wet prior to the hen entering the stunbath.

S 5.4.2 Stunning using a DC waveform is prohibited.

i There is mixed opinion from researchers as to the effectiveness of using a DC waveform for stunning chickens. In particular, there are concerns over whether a bird is effectively stunned when subjected to a DC waveform. Current literature on this subject states that DC stunning raises serious welfare concerns and that the use of DC stunning should be actively discouraged. Therefore, the use of DC stunning is prohibited under the scheme until there is further, unequivocal research in this area to suggest that DC stunning would offer at least a welfare neutral alternative to AC stunning.

- S 5.5** All stunning and bleeding equipment must:
- be properly maintained
 - be regularly cleaned
 - be checked daily to ensure that it is in full and proper working order.
- S 5.6** Any problems must be:
- reported to the PWO
 - rectified immediately.
- S 5.7** All birds leaving the water bath must be checked to ensure they have been effectively stunned or killed.
- S 5.8** Birds which fail to be properly stunned must be humanely slaughtered before entering the scalding tank.
- S 5.9** Staff must be trained to recognise the signs of an effective stun, and use these signs to ensure that birds have been effectively stunned or are dead.

i The most reliable indicator that a bird is properly stunned by the low voltage method is the electroplectic fit. The characteristics of this condition are:

- neck arched with head directed vertically
- open eyes
- wings held close to the body
- rigidly extended legs and constant rapid body tremors.

The physical conditions of the electroplectic fit are shorter lasting and less pronounced when cardiac arrest is induced at stunning. They are followed by:

- completely limp carcass
- no breathing
- loss of nictitating membrane reflex
- dilated pupils.

- S 5.10** Contingency plans must be made to deal with occasions when unavoidable delays may occur and it is not possible to process the birds.
- S 5.11** If the slaughter line is stopped for longer than 60 seconds, birds between the point of shackling and the killer must be humanely killed immediately.

Bleeding

i S 6.0 to S 6.5 do not apply to gas killing systems, whereby the birds are killed within the system.

- S 6.0** From 1st January 2016:
- birds must be decapitated
 - the head must be macerated immediately following decapitation.
- S 6.1** After stunning, both carotid arteries and jugular veins must be effectively severed using a ventral cut.
- S 6.2** Where an automatic neck cutter is used, the cut must be checked by the appointed member of staff who must be given sufficient time to sever the blood vessels manually, if necessary.

- S 6.3** No more than 10 seconds must elapse between stunning and neck cutting.
- S 6.3.1** There must be sufficient time after stunning and prior to neck cutting/decapitation to assess the effectiveness of the stun.
- S 6.4** All birds must be checked to ensure that they are dead before entering the scalding tank.
- S 6.5** Hens must not be immersed in a scalding tank or plucked until at least 90 seconds have elapsed since the major blood vessels in their necks have been severed.

Controlled Atmosphere Systems (CAS)

- S 7.1** Every person engaged in the gas killing must be properly instructed as to:
- a) the method of operation of the CAS
 - b) the procedures for any necessary flushing of the CAS with atmospheric air, and
 - c) the procedures for any necessary evacuation of birds from the CAS.
- S 7.2** Only the following gas mixtures are permitted:
- a) argon, nitrogen or other inert gases, or any mixture of these gases, in atmospheric air with a maximum of 2% oxygen by volume; or
 - b) any mixture of argon, nitrogen, or other inert gases with atmospheric air and carbon dioxide, provided that the carbon dioxide concentration does not exceed 30% by volume and the oxygen concentration does not exceed 2% by volume.

i The RSPCA is aware that recent scientific studies have shown that there may be additional welfare benefits to using alternative gas mixtures which are currently not permitted under the WASK Regulations 1995. The RSPCA will review the use of gas mixtures currently permitted in the RSPCA's welfare standards in light of any further recommendations made and relevant changes to existing UK Legislation.

- S 7.3** Where more than one type of gas is used, the gases must be mixed thoroughly prior to supply into the CAS.
- S 7.4** Daily checks must always be undertaken to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of gas to kill all birds to be received, prior to the commencement of the process.
- S 7.5** The gas concentrations must be continuously monitored.
- S 7.6** Birds must be:
- a) immersed into approved gas mixtures
 - b) held in that atmosphere until they are dead.
- S 7.6.1** The delivery of gases must be constantly monitored.
- S 7.6.2** Sensors monitoring the concentration of gases must be:
- a) fitted in different locations along the equipment
 - b) clearly marked and readily identified.

- S 7.7** The gas monitors/sensors installed in the equipment must be linked to an audible and visual alarm system, which is automatically triggered:
- a) when the gas concentration is incorrect
 - b) when the maximum residual oxygen level is above 2%.
- S 7.8** Gas monitoring/sensing devices must be:
- a) calibrated at regular intervals, according to manufacturer's advice
 - b) calibrated using certified calibration gases, to ensure the correct concentrations are maintained at all times.
- S 7.8.1** A verifiable record of calibration must be kept.
- S 7.9** Birds must not enter the equipment until the correct gas concentration has been established. This must be controlled automatically.
- S 7.10** Birds must not be subjected to any of the gas mixture prior to entry into the CAS.
- S 7.11** There must be appropriate equipment, such as an extractor fitted at the entrance to the equipment to effectively address S 7.10.
- S 7.12** All birds must be exposed to the maximum concentration of the gas mixture within a maximum of 10 seconds of entry into the system.

i The RSPCA Farm Animals Department is investigating the feasibility of installing CCTV equipment inside the Controlled Atmosphere System to allow visual assessment of the birds as they enter and pass through the system. The welfare standards will be reviewed as soon as further information about the availability of such equipment is known.

- S 7.12.1** There must be sufficient time after exiting the CAS and prior to any other procedure (e.g. neck cutting) to assess the effectiveness of the kill.
- S 7.13** On exiting the CAS, all birds must be checked immediately to ensure that they are dead.
- S 7.14** Any birds found to be conscious on exiting the CAS must be removed and humanely killed immediately.
- S 7.14.1** Verifiable records of birds recovering consciousness after exposure to gas mixtures must be maintained.
- S 7.15** In case of failure, there must be a back-up slaughter method available and ready for use at all times which is capable of dealing with all birds awaiting slaughter.
- S 7.16** On exiting the CAS, birds must be checked thoroughly to identify any signs of damage or injury which could have been caused whilst in the CAS.
- S 7.16.1** The causes of injury relating to S 7.16 must be thoroughly investigated to ascertain where and how this may have occurred.
- S 7.17** Any signs of damage or injury to birds which has occurred whilst in the CAS, and results of investigation into the cause, must be recorded.
- S 7.18** Where it is found that injury was caused while the birds were still conscious, immediate action must be taken to rectify the problem and to reduce the likelihood of such damage being caused to other birds.

- S 7.19** A contingency plan must be drawn up to include details of what action would be taken if a breakdown occurred while birds were still in the CAS, to avoid prolonged delays.
- S 7.19.1** Where live birds have remained in the CAS for longer than 2 minutes, the system must be flushed with atmospheric air to remove the remaining gases, and birds must be immediately removed for slaughter using a permitted back-up method.
- S 7.20** There must be a means of flushing the system with atmospheric air.

Planned on-farm slaughter/killing

- S 8.1** The only permitted methods for planned on-farm slaughter/killing (but see also S 8.2) are:
- a) hand held electrical stunning, immediately followed by neck cutting
 - b) captive-bolt followed by neck dislocation and bleeding (neck dislocation and bleeding are not necessary when captive-bolt is used for emergency culling or during disease control operations).
- S 8.2** Any producers considering neck dislocation for planned on-farm killing must contact and liaise with the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.
- S 8.3** The captive bolt device must be used and maintained according to the manufacturer's guidelines.
- S 8.4** Equipment that crushes the neck, including killing pliers, must not be used.



Equipment that crushes the neck is neither quick nor humane.

If producers are in any doubt as to whether the equipment they intend to use crushes or dislocates the neck, they should contact the Farm Animals Department prior to using the equipment.

Appendix 1

Transport – standard operating and emergency procedure

Items to be included

1. Out of hours telephone numbers and emergency procedure.
2. Accident procedure.
3. Certificate of motor insurance.
4. Tyres – punctures – codes of practice.
5. Mobile phones or other communication equipment (and procedures for use).
6. Guidelines on correct environmental conditions during the journey, depending on length of journey and ambient temperature.
7. RSPCA welfare standards relating to transport of laying hens and pullets.
8. Procedure for loading/unloading of poultry transporters.
9. Procedure for delivery of poultry to customer sites.
10. FTA – The *'Drivers' Handbook'* (2006), including tachograph regulations.
11. Fire extinguishers.
12. Operating procedures for roadside checks.
13. Defra leaflet *'Guide to Alleviation of Thermal Stress in Poultry in Lairage'* (Defra PB 3724, 1998).
14. Daily journey sheet.
- * 15. Torch.

Appendix 2

Depopulation Action Plan (DAP)

The following pages provide an example of a DAP template (see Transport - Depopulation section). The DAP template should be further developed to meet any specific requirements relating to a particular unit.

Responsibilities during depopulation:

- **Producer/farm manager (or named supervisor)**
Ultimately responsible for the welfare of the birds, until they are loaded into the transport modules/crates.
- **Catching team leader**
Responsible for supervising the catching process, making sure all catching team members are aware of their duties and are competent to carry them out.
- **Senior members of the catching team**
Experienced senior members of the catching team, appointed by the catching team leader, to help supervise the other members of the catching team.
- **Haulier (driver)**
Responsible for making sure all birds are fit to travel and for the welfare of birds from the time they are placed into the transport modules/crates until they are unloaded from the modules/crates at the abattoir.

Depopulation Action Plan (DAP) - prior to depopulation

To be completed by the producer/farm manager or appointed representative

Action	Carried out? (include date)
<i>Complete up to one month prior to depopulation</i>	
Liaise with the processor as to the depopulation date. Report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the production system b) number of birds c) breed d) approximate weight e) feather condition f) health status of the flock g) any access problems 	
Ensure the roadways are in good condition for access to the unit	
Ensure the ground where the loading of birds will take place is in good condition	
Liaise with the haulier and catching team leader regarding the arrival time	
Liaise with the catching team leader regarding catching frames, to establish whether or not the catching team will bring their own (Modules can be used for making a pen for the birds and are easily moved in the event that smothering begins)	
Prepare the catching plan (a copy to be kept with the DAP) Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the catching route <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - minimise the number of steps up, down or over required to reach the vehicle - minimise any problems of uneven or otherwise hazardous flooring - consider the width of the doorway's in order to allow easy and safe access when carrying birds - how to protect birds from adverse weather conditions once outside of the building, both during loading and whilst on the vehicle b) the handling plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - double leg catching - no more than three birds to be carried per hand - consider matching numbers in hands to multiples of the drawer stocking density - use of catching frames - consider penning into small groups to help minimise crowding and smothering - humane killing of unfit birds immediately, rather than being left until the end of the depopulation - how loose birds will be dealt with 	
Prepare contingency plan for the eventuality that the catching team cannot arrive as planned.	
<i>Complete the day before depopulation</i>	
Ensure all access roads and the areas around the poultry unit doors are clean, tidy and clear of clutter	

Depopulation Action Plan (DAP) - on the day of depopulation

To be completed by the producer/farm manager or appointed representative

Action	Carried out? (include date)
<i>Prior to arrival of the catching team and haulier</i>	
Ensure all non-permanent fixtures and fittings with the potential to hinder the catching process have been removed from: a) the catching area b) the route used for carrying birds out to the loading area This may include feeders, drinkers, perches and any other farm equipment, particularly where sharp edges and protrusions could cause injury to the birds or catching team.	
Close nest boxes	
Block off any corners etc where birds could hide	
<i>Upon arrival of the catching team/haulier</i>	
Give the written catching plan to the catching team leader	
Instruct the catching team leader as to the lighting available and where the controls are located	
Show the catching team leader where all necessary facilities are located In order to safeguard the welfare of the birds during depopulation it is important to create and keep a relaxed atmosphere in order to ensure that the operation proceeds smoothly. Providing facilities for the catching team, such as toilets, tea and coffee will help to achieve this.	

To be completed by the catching team leader

1) Procedure for dealing with loose birds:

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Depopulation Action Plan (DAP) - key personnel

Name of producer/farm manager or appointed supervisor:

Name (block capitals) Signature

Name of catching team leader:

Name (block capitals) Signature

* Name of catching team:

Name of senior (accredited) team member(s):

Name (block capitals) Signature

Name (block capitals) Signature

Name of catching team member responsible for the humane destruction of casualty birds:

Name (block capitals) Signature

* **Name of haulier:**

Name (block capitals) Signature

Depopulation Action Plan (DAP) - post depopulation

To be completed by the producer/farm manager or appointed representative

Number of unfit birds killed during catching	
Number of DOAs and injuries upon arrival at the abattoir (to be received within 48 hours of the depopulation)	
Causes of mortality:	
Action taken to prevent further deaths and injury:	

To be completed by the producer/farm manager or appointed representative and the catching team leader

Review of depopulation (include both positive and negative feedback)

a) Producer/farm manager's or appointed representative's comments:

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Signed: Date.....

b) Catching team leaders comments:

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Signed: Date.....

c) Detail's of any action required and by whom:

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Index

Subject	Page	Subject	Page
Air quality		Crates	
E 2.2	4	T 2.16	46
E 6.1, E 6.2	10	S 4.13	52
Ammonia		Depopulation	
E 6.2	10	E 9.4	14
Beak trimming		T 1.1, T 1.2	40
H 2.1	35	T 1.3 to T 1.9	41
H 2.2 to H 2.8	36	T 1.10 to T 1.21	42
Biosecurity		T 1.22 to T 1.30	43
M 1.5	25	T 2.2	44
H 4.1	37	T 2.14	45
H 4.2 to H 4.6	38	Disease	
Bleeding		E 7.2	11
S 5.5, S 6.0 to S 6.2	54	R 1.4	19
S 6.3 to S 6.5	55	R 1.7	20
S 8.1	57	M 1.5	25
Buildings		M 2.1	26
E 1.1 to E 2.3	4	M 5.1	28
E 2.4 to E 2.11	5	S 8.1	57
E 2.12, E 2.13	6	Disinfectants	
E 9.3	14	E 2.4	5
R 1.3	18	H 4.5	38
T 1.3	41	Drinker space	
Carbon dioxide		FW 2.3	2
E 6.2	10	Drinkers	
S 7.2	55	FW 1.10, FW 2.3, FW 2.4	2
Carbon monoxide		FW 2.6	3
E 6.2	10	E 2.2	4
Casualty slaughter		Dust	
H 5.1, H 5.1.1	38	E 6.1, E 6.2	10
H 5.2 to H 5.7	39	Dust bathing	
T 1.27 to T 1.29	43	E 3.3	7
S 3.3	49	R 5.2, R 5.2.1	23
S 4.10	51	Electrical installations	
Catching		E 2.5	5
<i>See Depopulation</i>		Emergencies	
Claw wear		E 2.2	4
E 2.7	5	M 1.5	25
Colony size		H 2.4	36
E 5.6	10	T 2.4	44
Controlled atmosphere system		S 2.1	47
S(TV) 1.1	48	S 3.9, S 4.2	50
S 7.1 to S 7.6.2	55	S 8.1	57
S 7.7 to S 7.18	56	Feed track systems	
S 7.19 to S 7.20	57	FW 1.8	2

Subject	Page	Subject	Page
Feeding space		Injuries	
FW 1.8	2	E 2.3	4
Flock size		E 9.2, E 9.3	14
E 5.6	10	R 2.1	21
E 9.13, E 9.14	15	M 1.6, M 3.1, M 3.3	26
Flooring		M 3.4 to M 3.6	27
E 3.1	6	H 1.5	31
E 3.3.1	7	H 1.6, H 1.8	32
E 7.2	11	H 1.13	35
E 8.1.1	12	T 1.22, T 1.27	43
S 3.10	50	T 2.2.2	44
Food		T 2.5, T 2.7	45
FW 1.1 to FW 1.4	1	S 3.2 to S 3.4, S 3.6	49
FW 1.5 to FW 1.11	2	S 4.4, S 4.10	51
E 9.17	15	S 7.16 to S 7.18	56
T 1.14	42	Inspection	
Free-range		E 2.6	5
E 5.6, E 5.7	10	E 3.3.1	7
E 9.6	14	E 4.3	8
R 1.0 to R 1.3	18	E 4.7	9
R 1.4	19	E 9.2, E 9.4	14
R 1.5 to R 1.9	20	M 1.6, M 1.7, M 3.1 to M 3.3	26
R 2.1 to R 3.3	21	M 3.4 to M 3.6, M 4.2	27
R 3.4 to R 4.1	22	H 2.7	36
R 4.2 to R 5.2.1	23	Lairage	
M 5.0	27	S(TV) 1.1	48
M 6.3	29	S 3.1 to S 3.7	49
Grit		S 3.8 to S 3.11	50
FW 1.1	1	Lighting	
Growth promoters		E 2.2	4
FW 1.4	1	E 4.1 to E 4.3	8
Heat stress		E 4.4 to E 4.7	9
E 6.3, E 6.5	11	E 5.7	10
T 2.15	46	E 7.3	12
S 3.2, S 3.3, S 3.5.1	49	M 4.4	27
Hygiene		T 1.15	42
FW 1.6	2	T 1.24	43
E 3.3	7	S 3.5	49
E 7.2	11	S 4.8	51
		S 5.3	52
		Litter	
		E 3.2, E 3.2.1	6
		E 3.3, E 3.4 to E 3.6	7
		E 3.7 to E 3.9	8
		Livestock capacity document	
		T 2.3	44

Subject	Page	Subject	Page
Managers		Poultry welfare officer	
E 1.2	4	S 2.3 to S 2.5	47
M 1.1 to M 1.5	25	S 2.6 to S 2.8	48
M 1.6, M 1.7	26	S 3.4	49
M 5.4, M 5.7	28	S 5.6	54
H 1.1, H 1.4	31	Pullets	
H 2.3, H 2.7	36	M 1.2	25
T 1.1, T 1.2	40	M 6.1 to M 6.3	29
T 1.4 to T 1.7	41	T 2.9	45
T 1.14	42	Range perimeter	
T 1.30	43	R 1.6	20
T 2.14	45	Records	
S 2.1, S 2.3, S 2.4	47	FW 1.1	1
S 2.7	48	FW 2.7	3
S 4.5	51	E 2.8.1	5
Medicines		E 4.2	8
H 3.1 to H 3.6	37	M 1.0, M 1.4	25
Moulting		M 1.6, M 1.7, M 3.2	26
H 1.9	32	M 7.1	29
Multi-tier		H 1.1, H 1.2	31
E 9.1	13	H 1.10	32
E 9.2 to E 9.11	14	H 1.12	34
E 9.12 to E 9.17	15	H 1.13	35
M 6.1	29	H 2.2, H 2.5, H 2.7	36
Nest boxes		H 3.4, H 3.6, H 4.1	37
E 7.1, E 7.2	11	H 4.2	38
E 7.3	12	H 5.7	39
M 3.1.1	26	T 1.3, T 1.7, T 1.8	41
Noise		T 2.5, T 2.6	45
T 2.10	45	S(TV) 1.4	48
S 4.8	51	S(TV) 1.5, S 3.4, S 3.7	49
Other animals		S 7.8.1, S 7.14.1, S 7.17	56
M 5.0	27	Relative humidity	
M 5.1 to M 5.7	28	E 6.2	10
Perches		T 2.3.1	44
E 5.2	9	S 3.5	49
E 8.1 to E 8.3.2	12	Shackling	
E 8.4 to E 8.7	13	S(TV) 1.1	48
R 5.2, R 5.2.1	23	S 4.1 to S 4.3	50
Popholes		S 4.4 to S 4.10	51
E 3.7	8	S 4.11 to S 4.13	52
E 9.16	15	S 5.4.1	53
R 3.1 to R 3.3	21	S 5.11	54
R 3.4 to R 3.9	22	Shade and shelter	
		R 1.4	19
		R 2.1	21
		R 5.1 to R 5.2.1	23

Subject	Page	Subject	Page
Stock-keepers		Transport temperature	
E 3.6	7	T 2.3.1	44
E 6.5	11	T 2.15	46
M 1.1, M 1.3	25	S 3.2	49
M 2.1, M 2.2	26	Transport times	
M 4.1, M 4.4	27	T 2.8, T 2.13 to T 2.14.1	45
Stocking density		Ventilation	
E 2.2	4	E 5.7, E 6.2	10
E 3.8	8	M 1.6	26
E 5.1 to E 5.5	9	M 4.3, M 4.4	27
E 5.6, E 5.7	10	T 1.17	42
E 9.5	14	T 2.3.1	44
R 4.1	22	T 2.15, T 2.16	46
R 4.2, R 5.1 to R 5.2.1	23	S 3.5	49
T 2.11	45	Verandas	
Stunning		E 3.7, E 3.8	8
H 5.2	39	R 3.7	22
S 2.5	47	Veterinary Health and Welfare Plan	
S 2.6, S(TV) 1.1	48	R 1.9	20
S 4.8	51	H 1.1 to H 1.3	31
S 4.11, S 4.12, S 5.1 to S 5.3	52	H 1.6, H 1.7, H 1.10	32
S 5.4 to S 5.4.2	53	H 1.11	33
S 5.5 to S 5.11, S 6.1	54	H 1.12	34
S 6.3, S 6.3.1	55	Veterinary surgeon	
S 8.1	57	FW 1.1	1
Thermal environment		FW 1.5, FW 2.1	2
E 1.1	4	R 1.9	20
E 6.3 to E 6.5	11	R 3.1	21
R 3.7	22	H 1.1, H 1.3	31
T 2.3.1	44	H 2.4	36
S 3.5	49	H 3.3	37
Training		H 5.1.1	38
M 1.3, M 1.4	25	H 5.4	39
H 2.5	36	Waste disposal	
H 5.1.1	38	H 3.1, H 3.2	37
T 1.10	42	Water	
T 1.29, T 2.1	43	FW 1.2	1
S 2.3, S 2.4	47	FW 2.1 to FW 2.5	2
S 4.4	51	FW 2.6, FW 2.7	3
S 5.9	54	E 5.7	10
Transport		E 9.17	15
T 1.1, T 1.2	40	M 1.5	25
T 1.3 to T 1.9	41	M 1.6	26
T 1.10 to T 1.21	42	T 1.13	42
T 1.22 to T 2.1	43	Wood preservatives	
T 2.1.1 to T 2.4	44	E 2.4	5
T 2.5 to T 2.14.1	45		
T 2.15 to T 2.17	46		
S 3.2, S 3.7	49		
Transport mortality			
T 2.7	45		
S 3.6, S 3.7	49		



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