



Poultry processing industry campaign report

This compliance campaign aimed to reduce the risk of injury to workers in the poultry processing industry, including labour hire and visa workers.



Key issues

The key risks for workers in this industry are musculoskeletal disorders due to:

- lifting, carrying or pushing stacked crates of product
- repetitive tasks from deboning hundreds of chickens with little opportunity to take breaks to maintain knives adequately
- repetitive reaching into pallean bins creating awkward postures
- falls at level on slippery and uneven surfaces.

The poultry processing industry has consistently higher workers' compensation claims rates when compared to overall manufacturing industry rates.

In 2017-18, the claim incidence rate per 1000 employees (time lost claims) for poultry processing was 29.3 compared to 16.0 for all of manufacturing.



The campaign

Campaign objectives included:

- helping poultry processing and labour hire companies identify gaps and improve their work health and safety management systems
- helping industry identify hazards and implement higher order risk controls
- ensuring labour hire providers comply with the *Labour Hire Licensing Act 2017* (LHL Act)
- ensuring 457 and 417 visa workers have fair and safe work conditions.

A two-part assessment was conducted at each workplace, involving:

1. A desktop review of the business' safety management system, including consultative mechanisms, hazard identification and risk management processes, training and supervision.
2. Consulting workers to verify the effectiveness of risk controls at the workplace, including asking workers about manual tasks, operation and maintenance of fixed plant and dollies, inspectors observing the work environment, and condition of walk ways, flooring and drainage.



Findings

From November 2018 to June 2019, 14 poultry processing workplaces were visited, and 49 notices were issued for:

- failure to manage the risk of musculoskeletal disorders due to exposure to repetitive tasks, awkward postures and high forces
- poor maintenance on wheels of dollies and pallet racking
- blunt knives and inadequate knife sharpening training and facilities
- failure to manage the risk of slips, trips and falls at level
- failure to test and tag electrical equipment
- inadequate or no personal protective equipment
- poor or non-existent safe systems of work
- inadequate consultative arrangements between workers and management
- poor information, training, instruction and supervision of workers and labour hire employees
- unsafe storage and use of hazardous chemicals.

Inspectors also examined work arrangements between host site poultry processors and labour hire providers. In total, eight unlicensed labour hire providers at four sites were referred to the Labour Hire Licensing and Compliance Unit (LHLCU) for action. LHLCU assessed each of these and provided advice and guidance about their obligations under the LHL Act.



Positive work health and safety outcomes

Several processors made significant improvements, including:

- developing a safe system of work and implementing training, instruction and supervision for all workers on site.
- providing knife sharpening devices
- engaging compliant labour hire agencies
- employing labour hire workers as full-time staff
- purchasing new plant and equipment
- improving induction, training and consultation with workers
- enhancing fixed plant guarding
- rectifying racking systems
- introduced maintenance programs on material handling equipment such as crate dollies.



Positive labour hire worker/ agreement outcomes

Providing labour hire services in Queensland without a licence is illegal.

The campaign provided a timely opportunity to assist and educate poultry processors and labour hire providers about their obligations under the LHL Act. This resulted in the following outcomes from the campaign:

- a poultry processor terminated its contract with an unlicensed labour hire provider and engaged a new licensed labour hire provider
- three poultry processors terminated their contracts with five unlicensed labour hire providers and directly employed the workers.
- a company was convicted of the offence of providing labour without a licence under section 10 of the Labour Hire Licensing Act 2017 on 13 November 2020 and fined \$50,000.



Future actions

To support ongoing health and safety improvements in the poultry processing industry, future campaigns could include:

- revisiting the 14 poultry processors assessed and any new processors, using a redesigned tool to target specific risks identified in this campaign
- encouraging poultry processors with poor compliance to self-refer to the Injury Prevention and Management program
- distributing the campaign report to industry associations, poultry processors visited during the campaign and through work health and safety and industry publications.



Campaign resources

- Labour hire agencies: Managing the safety of on-hired workers
- Poultry processing industry self-assessment checklist
- *Work health and safety consultation, co-operation and co-ordination Code of Practice 2011*

More information

For more information on work health and safety, visit [WorkSafe.qld.gov.au](https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au) or call 1300 362 128.