

FROM: BRIAN DOOHER
BRANCH: EPIZOOTICS & PUBLIC HEALTH
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DATE: 10 MAY 2020

TO: EDWIN POOTS MLA
MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS

SUB/1311/2020 – INSPECTIONS OF MEAT PROCESSING ESTABLISHMENTS BY HEALTH & SAFETY EXECUTIVE NORTHERN IRELAND (HSENI).

SUMMARY

Issue: Inspections of meat processing establishments by Health & Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI).

Timing: Desk Immediate.

SpAd Comments:

Financial Implications: N/A.

Employment of External Consultants Implications: N/A.

Legislation Implications: N/A.

Equality Implications: N/A.

FOI Implications: Official Sensitive – Information provided in confidence by HSENI.

Rural Needs Implications: N/A.

Executive Referral: N/A.

Presentational Issues: Veterinary Service Animal Health Group (VSAHG) officials are working with Food Business Operators (FBOs), Health & Safety Executive, Northern Ireland (HSENI), Public Health Agency (PHA) and Food Standards Agency (FSA) to minimise the risk to the health and safety of all personnel through the implementation of PHA guidance during processing.

Adherence to public health advice and in particular social distancing within the food processing sector has been of interest to the

media and continues to generate comment.

**Date Draft Press Release
cleared by Press Office:**

10 May 2020.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that you note the:

- **Contents of this submission; and**
- **Draw on the lines to take in Annex A as required.**

ISSUE

1. On week commencing 4th May, Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) officials completed unannounced inspections on three slaughterhouses, namely Moy Park Ballymena, Karro Cookstown & Foyle Omagh. Inspections were initiated in response to high levels of complaints received by HSENI from employees, the general public and elected representatives in relation to the Food Business Operator (FBO) failings around adherence to Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance and in particular social distancing.
2. Preliminary findings supplied in confidence by HSENI officials have revealed the following findings:
 - Moy Park Ballymena – Generally satisfactory.
 - Foyle Omagh – Whilst a range of safeguarding measures were being implemented significant areas for improvement were identified.
 - Karro, Cookstown – Major deficiencies identified. In general minimal attempts have been made to put in place the necessary safeguarding measures for operatives in accordance with PHA guidance and in particular adherence to social distancing protocols.
3. HSENI officials provided a verbal debrief to FBO management at the closing meeting on their findings which was subsequently followed up with a written report outlining in detail the deficiencies identified, remedial actions required, timescale for completion and the requirement for the provision of confirmatory evidence. Follow up visits will be completed as required.
4. Although disappointed to receive these findings, it should be noted that Veterinary Service Animal Health group officials have coordinated and chaired regular (often daily) meetings over the past 6 weeks with:
 - Food Business Operators from the poultry, beef, lamb and pork sectors.
 - Deputy Chief Executive of HSENI.
 - Head of Health Protection at PHA, and
 - Food Standards Agency (FSA).
5. The primary objective of these meetings is to ensure both DAERA & Industry are familiar with and implementing the latest PHA guidance, which is primarily aimed at

ensuring a safe working environment for all personnel. It also provides a forum for industry to raise and discuss any issues or challenges they may have around implementation of PHA guidance.

6. FBOs adherence to and implementation of Public Health Agency guidance and in particular social distancing is fundamental to the ongoing health and safety of all personnel which in turn enables the continued delivery of Departmental and Government objectives of:
 - Protecting citizens and the NHS.
 - Providing supplies of safe food.
 - Maintaining agri-food supply chain continuity and environmental standards.
7. Adherence to PHA guidance and in particular social distancing has proven challenging for FBOs, and in particular for the pork operators. PHA guidance instructs that for food processing establishments, 2m social distancing should be adhered to and where the production environment makes this difficult, other alternative mitigating measures (eg screens, working back to back, or side to side) must be introduced to control risk and protect staff.
8. Pork FBOs have previously reported that they would be unable to maintain throughput at current levels whilst adhering to social distancing rules and have ruled out the possibility of extending operating hours or introducing additional shifts to mitigate the effects of reduced line speeds.
9. In conjunction with industry representatives, DAERA officials have taken forward the development of COVID contingency plans for the pork supply chain. Consideration has been given to a number of potential scenarios including reductions and suspensions of processing capacity. Next contingency planning meeting is on Thursday 14 May.

RECOMMENDATION

10. It is recommended that you note the:
 - Contents of this submission; and
 - Draw on the lines to take in Annex A as required.

Brian Dooher

Brian Dooher
Director Epizootics & Public Health



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Press Office
VS Co-Ordination

Annex A

Lines to Take

- Aware of and welcome the recent HSENI inspections to meat establishments. These inspections will help to provide the necessary reassurance to our key workers that all PHA guidance is being adhered to during these challenging times.
- My officials have been working closely with Industry representatives, HSENI & PHA over the past number of weeks and very much value this collaborative working relationship and hope to maintain it into the future.
- Well done to all those establishments adhering to PHA guidance and social distancing and ensuring the production of safe food and agri-food supply chain continuity.
- We are all united on the fact that providing a safe working environment for our key workers in the food processing sectors through adherence to PHA guidance and in particular social distancing is essential to:
 - Protecting our citizens and the NHS
 - Providing continued supplies of safe food.
 - Maintaining agri-food supply chain continuity and environmental standards.
- In effect supply chains will cease to operate if we fail to comply with PHA guidance & social distancing and protect our key workers.
- Food processing should never come at the expense of the health and safety of our workforce and employers should fully implement the PHA guidance to ensure personnel are not put at unnecessary risk.