

Reports and Comments

AVMA 2016 slaughter guidelines

In July of last year (2016) the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) released 'Guidelines for the Humane Slaughter of Animals: 2016 Edition'. The species covered are hoofed stock (cattle, bison, horses, mules, sheep, goats, swine, deer and elk), poultry (chickens, turkeys, pheasants, ratites, geese and ducks), fish (farmed and commercially caught wild fish), rabbits and alligators. The guidelines are provided specifically for animals which are reared and slaughtered for human food consumption (estimated by the Humane Society to be 4.6 billion animals annually), and do not include animals raised and killed for their fur, skins or any other product.

The document is a result of 12 years of work by 15 individuals including veterinarians, animal scientists and an ethicist. For the commercially produced hoofed stock species (cattle, calves, horses, mules, sheep and swine) already included in the federal Humane Methods of Livestock Slaughter Act (1978), these AVMA recommendations extend an additional, higher tier of welfare standards. For species not covered by enforceable nationwide legislation (ie bison, deer, elk, poultry, fish, rabbits and alligators), the new AVMA publication provides a solid foundation offering practical guidance on unloading from vehicles, handling and humane slaughter. For some species, it is the first time such a publication has been produced in the USA and it is hoped this will help to safeguard animal welfare throughout the slaughter process.

The guidelines are divided into six parts starting with a general introduction followed by the history of animal welfare legislation and enforcement in the USA. The authors recognise the importance of maintaining welfare from the time the animals arrive at the abattoir to confirmation of death. The guidelines offer advice on good handling practices during unloading and in the lairage and also propose alterations in slaughterhouse design to ease the movement of animals through the facility. Species-specific stunning and killing methods are clearly explained along with physiological indicators which should be applied to confirm loss of consciousness and death. Part five is dedicated to unique special issues and areas requiring additional consideration. This includes topics such as emergency killing in the lairage and the less conventional methods required to humanely slaughter species, such as rabbits, ratites, fish and alligators. In each section, potential problems and practical means of correction are given in order to help operators improve the welfare of animals in their plants. The final part of the document covers facilities in which religious slaughter is performed for the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

The AVMA guidance document is the second in a three-part series providing veterinarians with scientifically based, practical advice on the most humane methods available for the killing of animals. The first in the series was the 'Guidance of Euthanasia' which was previously reviewed in the August 2013 issue of *Animal Welfare* (22 [3]). Part three is expected to be released later this year. It will focus on the 'Depopulation of Animals' and will address the methods suitable for use during disease outbreaks or natural disasters.

AVMA Guidelines for the Humane Slaughter of Animals: 2016 Edition (2016). A4, 64 pages. American Veterinary Medical Association, Schaumburg, IL, USA. Available free of charge at: <https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/AnimalWelfare/Documents/Humane-Slaughter-Guidelines.pdf>.

S Richmond,

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Guidelines for wildlife rehabilitation centres

The British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS) has recently published 'Good Practice Guidelines for Wildlife Rehabilitation Centres'. The BVZS note that there is a lack of legislation intended to specifically protect the welfare of injured or displaced indigenous wild animals in the United Kingdom (UK) that may require treatment, rehabilitation and, where appropriate, release. The welfare of wild animals instead falls, to various extents, under a variety of legislative Acts, including: The Animal Welfare Act (2006); The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981); Zoo Licensing Act (1981); and the Dangerous Wild Animals Act (1976).

According to the BVZS the "comparatively weak framework of regulation has resulted in variable care of wildlife casualties throughout the UK and has on occasion led to members of the veterinary profession being investigated by their Regulator, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons".

The BVZS state that the primary aim of a wildlife centre should always be "to return an animal successfully to the wild with a chance of survival and potential to reproduce, at least equivalent to that of other free-living members of its species". Emphasis is placed on wildlife centres only admitting species for which they have facilities, space, and appropriate knowledge and that where a centre is unable to provide a full spectrum of care (ie primary first aid, secondary treatment, and rehabilitation), this should be recognised and provision made for care to be carried out elsewhere.