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How to monitor moving pigs to the stunner?

- Slippery floors, steep ramps, inappropriate handling and fatigue may cause pigs to slip and fall and may cause pain, injuries and fear while being moved.
- Facing the stunning area pigs are usually experiencing fear and/or pain and distress and may attempt to back out or turn back which often results in slipping or falling. 
- In CO₂-stunning the wrong use of automatic doors and push gates may cause fear leading to high pitch vocalisations, turning back or refusing to move, slipping and falling and/or injuries and bruises. Moving pigs from a group into a single raceway for electrical stunning is often accompanied with high line speeds which does not allow pigs to orientate themselves and rough handling, high noise levels from rattles or the (wrong/ excessive) use of electric prods leading to fear, reluctance to move on and high pitch vocalisations. Pigs may also refuse to move, attempt to back out or turn back when moved into a restrainer or conveyor belt system due to fear and distress, which also can lead to high pitch vocalisations.

Legal requirements


Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009:

Requirements associated with handling at the time of slaughter and killing:

{Chapter II, Article 3, Point 1., Point 2.a, d}: prevention of pain, distress, falling and slipping.

{Chapter II, Article 7, Point 1., Point 2.a, b}: level and certificate of competence.

{Chapter II, Article 14}: layout, construction and equipment of slaughterhouses.

{Chapter II, Article 15, Point 1.}: handling and restraining operations at slaughterhouses. 

Note: Listed requirements are not comprehensive.

Moreover, there might be stricter national legislation in place.

Inspection method (recommended)

- The official inspector assesses slipping and falling, reluctance to move and turning back, and high pitch vocalisations during handling and moving the pigs to the stunner.
- If pigs, refuse to move/turn back, slip/fall or vocalise at high pitch the inspector evaluates the design of the raceways and their facilities, the handling of the pigs by the personnel, and the Business Operator's SOPs concerning monitoring and management of these indicators.
- In case of infringements, the inspector reports findings to the Business Operator (BO) and/or Animal Welfare Officer.
- In case of infringements, the inspector verifies the SOPs of the slaughterhouse and corrective actions are carried out by the BO to ensure the situation complies with legal requirements in the future.

Distress and fear behaviours Assessment method

All pigs will be assessed at group level when driven to the stunning area. The same animals can be scored for turning back & reluctance to move as well as for slipping & falling at the same time. High pitched vocalisations should be scored separately. Depending on the slaughter capacity, 2 inspectors may be necessary.

Check

Reluctance to move is defined as stopping for at least 2 seconds, not exploring, not moving the body and the head (freezing) or refusing to move when stimulated by the operator.

Turning back is defined as turning back to or attempts to return to the lairage area.

Slipping is defined as a loss of balance, without (a part of) the body touching the floor. Moreover, an animal slipping while it is falling will only be considered as falling (see measure 'falling').

Falling is defined as loss of balance in which any part(s) of the body (except the legs) touch the floor. In addition, an animal is considered as falling only if it was previously standing up. An animal slipping while it is falling will only be considered as falling.

High pitched vocalisations are defined as squeals or screams at high pitch, when pigs are moved or manipulated from the lairage area into the stunner. Record HPV at group level in the final stages of driving towards the stunner during moving through the chute leading to the restrainer. If an animal in the group displays HPV, this is recorded in the audit protocol. In both one-zero sampling and instantaneous sampling you need a beeper that gives a signal every 20 s.

One-zero sampling: Listen whether any of the observed pigs vocalise or not during those 20 s of focal observations.

Instantaneous sampling: At the tone, marking the end of the interval, record whether any of the pigs is vocalizing at that moment. Note if a single pig is vocalizing or several pigs. Assess the pigs three times during 4 minutes per period (total of 12 min).

No or low risk to welfare



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Scan the QR code to watch these pigs moving to the stunner without being reluctant to move, turning back, slipping and falling.

High risk to welfare



©WQ

Scan the QR code to watch some of these pigs being reluctant to move and turning back during unloading.



©WQ

Scan the QR code to watch some of these pigs falling during unloading.



©WQ

Scan the QR code to watch these pigs moving to the stunner without showing high pitched vocalisations (HPV).



©WQ

Scan the QR code to watch these pigs showing high pitched vocalisations (HPV) while moved to the stunner.

Source for the assessment method: Welfare Quality, 2009



EU Reference Centre
for Animal Welfare Pigs

If you have any questions or suggestions regarding this factsheet please contact info.pigs@eurcaw.eu