



Use of Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) in the supervision and verification of animal welfare standards in approved premises

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The UEVH/FVE support the use of high quality, well-placed, accessible CCTV operating to agreed standards and protocols. Such a system can only ever remain a useful but additional tool to assist the FBO and CA staff and not be a replacement for effective full-time veterinary supervision of the slaughter operation.

Background

The use of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV), also known as video surveillance, in slaughterhouses for the purposes of providing additional supervision of animal handling and slaughter practices is much debated in several countries. CCTV is already often used by Food Business Operators (FBOs) to facilitate them in discharging their regulatory responsibilities requiring them to ensure that animals under their care are handled from arrival to death in a humane manner at all stages of pre-slaughter production. However, the application of CCTV remains, in many countries, voluntary and variably regulated. In most cases, the Official Veterinarian does not have access to this system nor the resultant footage to assist him/her in carrying out his verification role with respect to the monitoring of animal welfare standards.

As a result of several cases of under-cover reporters identifying unacceptable animal handling and poor welfare and food safety standards in some slaughterhouses in different countries there is increasing pressure for Competent Authorities to impose mandatory CCTV recording in slaughterhouses.

Potential advantages of mandatory CCTV

- Increase opportunities to observe and verify compliances with animal handling practice and the slaughter process (including stunning);
- provide protection of the food chain and public health;
- contribute to improving consumer confidence that FBO's are taking all necessary steps to maximise animal welfare;
- observe and record key animal-management based indicators;
- provide a valuable training tool to assist in achieving continuous improvement in slaughter processes and provide key information for animal welfare auditing;
- provide supplementary evidence in response to any allegations of illegal activity;
- provide evidence of incidents of bullying and harassment towards Competent Authority staff (OV and OA) whilst carrying out their official duties in approved slaughter premises.

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Challenges to the use of mandatory CCTV:

- Concerns about privacy of individuals and pressure induced by being constantly monitored;
- Cost to install the system, store all the recordings and train staff, particularly for small and micro premises;
- Cost to maintain the CCTV system;
- Adequate time for Animal Welfare Officers (AWO) and Official Veterinarians to inspect all the footage as and when needed;

Considerations

In order for CCTV to be useful:

- Due consideration to data protection and confidentiality must be undertaken;
- High-quality, well positioned cameras should be used which are able to operate in a dusty and steamy environment often under poor lighting conditions;
- They must be positioned appropriately to cover all areas in which animals are being handled – from arrival to death; to ensure clear, unobstructed recording of all areas where live animals are unloaded, kept, handled, stunned and killed; as well as in strategic (risk-based) places post stun which might impact on the period until death;
- The system must be monitored on a regular basis by the FBO operating under agreed protocols and to approved Standard Operating Procedures that clearly define all usage parameters, and, in particular, actions to be taken when issues are identified;
- Footage should be retained and be accessible as required for a period of no less than **90** days and the use and access to the footage should be controlled by strict protocols;
- Those using the equipment must have undertaken effective training that permits a sound understanding of acceptable animal handling practices and thus enables an operative to carry out a meaningful assessment via the CCTV system. Competent Authority veterinary staff must have unrestricted access to the live and recorded footage;
- Competent Authority veterinary staff should be appropriately trained and have additional time and resource allocated to them in order to carry out this additional verification check;
- Consideration may be given to the size of premises. A risk-based decision can be taken depending upon the history of compliance of the FBO, the lay-out and size of the establishment/operation, the type of stock being slaughtered and the effectiveness of the existing animal welfare protocols;
- Cost of the installation and use of the CCTV system can be borne either by the CA in fulfilling its 'public good' function and the FBO in discharging its legal duties.
- Remote access to the CCTV system by the Competent Authority and the FBO might also be considered through the use of web-based surveillance systems.

The maintenance of high standards of animal welfare and food safety standards remains the responsibility of the FBO. Even with CCTV present, the Official Veterinarian will never be able to provide 100% supervision of all aspects of the FBO's controls on a continuous basis, since they cannot be present at every point throughout the process at all times. The role of the Official Veterinarian is to verify that the FBO's controls are being implemented appropriately and effectively.

Should CCTV be mandated by legislation in any Member State then it is essential that the legislation is sufficiently robust and detailed to permit effective enforcement should

non-compliance be observed. It must be drafted so as to permit the OV to carry out the required supervisory checks in a practical manner and feasible way and to monitor activity in those areas that are more difficult to access such as stunning area; compatible with the time dedicated to official activity. The OV should also have the power to take robust and immediate enforcement action when animal welfare or other failures are identified.

Conclusions

CCTV is a useful additional tool to further assist an FBO and their staff (AWO) and Competent Authority staff (OV and OA) in carrying out their responsibilities to protect animal welfare and ensure adequate food safety standards. It can provide a number of different benefits to employers, employees, and the public as well as animal welfare. However, **it can never be a replacement for on-going, physical, on-site inspection by Official Veterinarians.**

The outcome of veterinary inspections is largely dependent on capacity, authority, and support from the hierarchy of the veterinary services. FVE has expressed, on a number of occasions, its concern with respect to the on-going trend to reduce the number of controls carried out Official Veterinarians. Delegating critical inspection tasks - such as checking the health and welfare of the animals prior to slaughter – from the independent Official Veterinarian to slaughterhouse personnel, would put at risk animal health and welfare and jeopardise consumer protection throughout Europe.

A high level of awareness, training and engagement of everyone involved with live animal handling, from transportation through to slaughter, is essential. At every stage in the process animals must be treated and recognised as sentient beings, able to experience fear, to feel pain and to suffer. Animals should never be treated as objects without sentience.

CCTV cannot, under any circumstances, be used as a replacement or to facilitate a reduction in veterinary inspections by Official Veterinarians at slaughterhouses. Nevertheless, it is a useful tool to help FBOs and Official Veterinarians to do their job more effectively. UEVH/FVE recommend that, if a country introduces mandatory CCTV recording in slaughterhouses, the development of “Codes of Best Practice” documents would support effective and consistent deployment of this developing technology.

NOTES TO EDITORS

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is an umbrella organisation of 44 veterinary organisations from 38 European countries, representing a total of around 240 000 veterinarians. The Union of European Veterinary Hygienists (UEVH) is a member and section of the FVE. The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) strives to promote animal health, animal welfare and public health across Europe.

*For further information, consult the FVE website www.fve.org
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