

Worker Safety in the Meat and Poultry Industry

The meat and poultry industry's commitment to improving worker and workplace safety is reflected in the significant and consistent decline in illness and injury rates among its 500,000 workers for the past two decades. While the meat and poultry industry remains relatively labor intensive, workers currently enjoy significantly improved safety conditions, with a steady trend of continuous improvement. Promoting safe workplaces has rewards for both workers and businesses, including increased productivity, consistent product quality, improved employee morale, and reduced absenteeism as well as reduced expenses associated with injury and illness.

Much of the improvement can be traced to two major efforts initiated by the meat industry in 1990.

1. The U.S. meat industry, together with OSHA and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union, developed Voluntary Ergonomic Guidelines for the Meat Packing Industry—guidelines that OSHA called a “model” for other industries. Some specific changes the meat industry has seen since instituting these guidelines include:
 - Significantly reduced levels of injuries and illnesses;
 - Continuing efforts to eliminate ergonomic risks and hazards in the workplace;
 - Programs and process improvements tailored to individual plant situations;
 - Development of an array of new tools, equipment, methods and production processes.
2. A decision was made by the NAMI Board of Directors to make workplace safety a non-competitive issue, and encouraging their respective company staffs to share information on safety practices. This decision enabled the NAMI Worker Safety Committee to pursue a number of safety improvements, including the annual NAMIF Conference on Worker Safety and Human Resources which has taken place ever since.

Results of these initiatives have been quite positive as illustrated by the graphs on the following pages.

BACKGROUND

The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 was the first safety and health law covering more than 90 million employees throughout the U.S. It was developed to ensure safe working conditions for all employees. The Act sets minimum standards that must be followed by all employers to reduce or eliminate workplace hazards. Employers are held responsible for training, implementing effective safety programs, maintaining equipment and continually assessing the workplace to remove or mitigate any hazards present.

Because the meat and poultry industry is labor intensive and because meat processing requires sharp tools and repetitive motion, selecting proper equipment for the job is critical (and required by OSHA). In the industry, these OSHA rules mandate protective equipment for the eyes, face and head, protective clothing, respiratory devices, machine guarding devices to protect employees against a variety of hazards (including chemical or mechanical irritants), and many other workplace safety requirements. Employers are not only responsible for providing equipment, but maintaining that equipment in a safe, sanitary and reliable condition. Employers are also responsible for providing safe work practices that do not put workers at additional risk.

Given these conditions, the meat industry has worked diligently to comply with OSHA rules and standards, and to provide safe working conditions in all phases of plant operations.

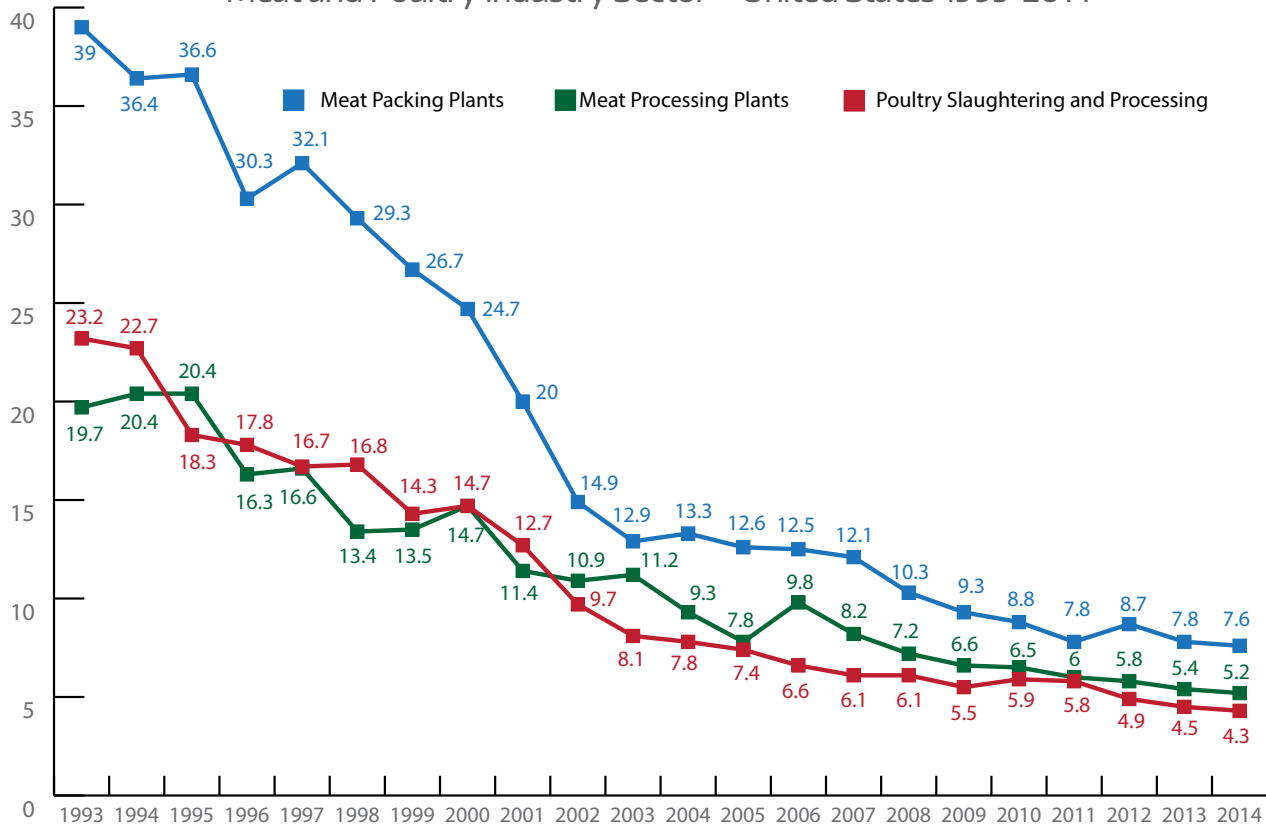
INJURY & ILLNESS RATES

Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data indicate that the actual incidence of injuries and illnesses reported in the Meat Industry for 2014 the most recent year for which data is available) are the lowest since BLS began recording this data in the early 1970s. Over the last 20 years, injury/illness rates in the U.S. meat industry have improved by nearly 80 percent, as efforts to enhance workplace safety have taken effect.

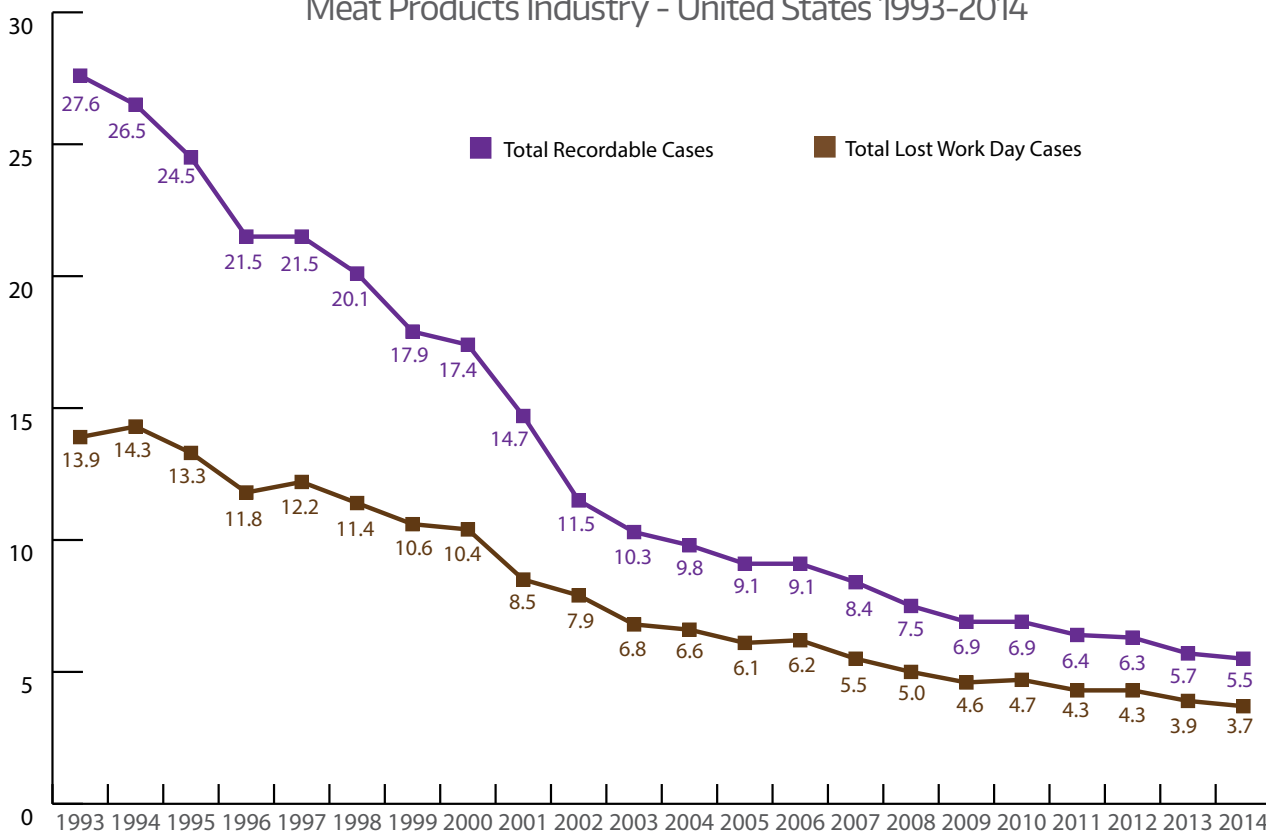
Not all injuries and illnesses are alike. BLS provides separate data to categorize the seriousness of injuries and illnesses it records. These are the Total Incidents (Recordable) rate, and the Lost Workday Case rate. Recordables are all incidents “recorded” on the OSHA log; those requiring medical attention beyond normal first aid. Lost Workdays are a subset of Recordables, and can occur under two circumstances – an injury serious enough to require at least one day away from work, or an injury requiring restricted job activity. Restricted activity can include shortened hours, a temporary job change or transfer, restriction from certain job duties or a combination of all three.

In the BLS “Animal Slaughter and Processing” subgroup – which includes meat packing, meat processing and poultry processing sectors – final 2014 data reports 5.5 injury occurrences per 100 full-time workers per year. This is a reduction of 3.5% from 2013 results. The more serious injuries, those requiring lost work days (as defined above) exhibited a decrease from the 2013 rate of 3.9 to a rate of 3.7 in 2014; a reduction of 5.1%. Both the total incidents rate and the more severe lost workday case rate currently stand at all-time lows for the industry.

Rate of Injury and Illness Cases per 100 Full-Time Workers Meat and Poultry Industry Sector – United States 1993-2014



Combined Rate of Injury and Illness Cases per 100 Full-Time Workers Meat Products Industry - United States 1993-2014



VOLUNTARY ERGONOMICS GUIDELINES

In 1990, the U.S. meat industry, together with OSHA and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) union, developed Voluntary Ergonomic Guidelines for the Meat Packing Industry—guidelines that OSHA called a “model” for other industries. Since then, the meat industry has been successful in implementing these programs and reducing the number and severity of injuries. The key to these successful guidelines are their flexibility and specificity to the meat industry.

The goal of the guidelines is to improve ergonomics in the meat and poultry industry and to prevent the occurrence of Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) in the workplace. MSDs are caused by combinations of repetitive motions, awkward postures or work positions, and/or exertions of significant force – usually, occurring over a long period of time. There are numerous other potential factors, but these three are often prevalent in the meat industry, and likely account for the majority of MSDs. The goal of any ergonomics program is to reduce, to the greatest extent possible, the physiological cost of performing the work. It is in this objective that the guidelines were developed.

Dramatic reductions in the rate of illness and injury at U.S. meat packing plants speak to the value of voluntary, industry specific worker safety and ergonomics programs. While there is more progress to be made in enhancing workplace safety, the meat and poultry industry recognizes that ensuring the health and safety of its workers is the right thing to do—and makes good business sense.

The Meatpacking Ergonomics Guidelines encourage employers to take a series of steps in implementing a comprehensive ergonomics program. These steps fall into four categories: Work site analysis, Hazard prevention and control, Medical management, and Training.

WORK SITE ANALYSIS

Work site analysis identifies any existing problem areas and evaluates conditions and operations for potential hazards. The goal of work site analysis is to recognize, identify and evaluate ergonomic hazards.

HAZARD PREVENTION AND CONTROL

An effective program will include four different levels of controls:

- Engineering controls – Make the job fit the person by designing or modifying work areas, work methods and

tools to eliminate potential MSD risks to the greatest extent possible.

- Work practice controls – An effective prevention and control program includes procedures for safe and proper work that are understood and followed by managers, supervisors and workers.

The key factors of such controls are (1) proper work techniques (e.g. proper cutting and lifting techniques), (2) employee conditioning, or break-in, periods, and (3) regular monitoring, feedback, maintenance, and adjustments.

- Personal protective equipment (PPE) – PPE should be chosen with ergonomic stressors in mind. PPE should be provided in a variety of sizes, should accommodate the physical requirements of workers and the job and should not contribute to extreme postures and/or excessive forces.
- Administrative controls – Several administrative controls can be used to reduce the duration, frequency and severity of ergonomic stressors. Rest breaks and job rotations can relieve fatigued muscles; job enlargement combines two or more jobs to reduce repetition and utilize varying work patterns.

MEDICAL MANAGEMENT

An effective medical management program will use early identification and treatment methods to eliminate or reduce the risk of employees’ developing MSDs. According to the guidelines, a physician or occupational health nurse (OHN) with training in the prevention of MSDs should supervise the program.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

The purpose of training and education is to ensure that employees are sufficiently informed about the ergonomic hazards around them. This should enable employees to participate actively in their own protection. Training allows managers, supervisors and employees to understand ergonomic and other hazards associated with a job or production process, plus prevention and medical consequences.

The guidelines advise that training programs should include all affected employees, engineers and maintenance personnel, supervisors, managers and health care providers. The program should be designed and implemented by qualified persons and presented in appropriate language and at a level of understanding of those being trained.

SAFETY AS A NON-COMPETITIVE ISSUE

By making safety a non-competitive issue, the NAMI Board of Directors unleashed collaborative efforts by the full membership where worker and workplace safety are concerned. The NAMI Worker Safety Committee is comprised of safety managers and related personnel from all member companies, and routinely communicates concerning a wide range of safety concerns and practices. Each year the committee puts on an annual conference where safety professionals gather to discuss a variety of safety matters and receive the latest in educational offerings on the full range of safety topics. This conference has been conducted ever since the board's action in 1990.

NAMI'S POSITION

The North American Meat Institute strongly supports continuous improvements in worker and workplace safety, and believes that efforts to improve safety are a vital and necessary focus for the industry.

The NAMI Worker Safety and Human Resources committees meet 3-4 times annually to keep members up to date on OSHA activity, review specific rules and hazard exposures, and share specific safety applications. Committee membership is open to all member companies. The Worker Safety Committee actively works on various projects with the goal of continuous reduction of injury and illness occurrences. Among other things, this includes development and presentation of the annual NAMIF Conference on Worker Safety, Health and Human Resources, the premier meat industry event focused on worker and workplace safety.

The meat industry's 500,000 employees represent an essential resource. These workers must have a safe work environment if they are to perform their jobs in an optimal and effective manner. We believe that workplace safety has direct, positive impact on quality, productivity, cost, turnover, and related measures of industry success. The industry remains steadfast in efforts to develop and implement continuous safety improvements in our operations. Such efforts provide immediate and significant return on investment, and are clearly in the industry's best interests.

For more information on worker safety in the meat and poultry industry, contact NAMI at (202) 587-4200 or visit www.meatinstitute.org.

HELPFUL LINKS

North American Meat Institute

<http://www.meatinstitute.org>

<http://www.workersafety.org>

National Safety Council

<http://www.nsc.org>

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

<http://www.osha.gov>