

2021 UPDATES TO THE NORTH AMERICAN MEAT INSTITUTE RECOMMENDED ANIMAL HANDLING GUIDELINES & AUDIT GUIDE

The North American meat industry has come together on a specific set of recommendations for handling and humane slaughter of cattle, swine, and sheep. Since 1991, the North American Meat Institute has encouraged its members to subscribe to voluntary animal welfare guidelines and to embrace auditing programs and they have done so. The meat industry was the first sector in animal agriculture to develop such guidelines and to begin self-audit programs. The North American Meat Institute released its updated 2021 Recommended Animal Handling Guidelines and Audit Guide in January 2021. This replaces the 2019 edition.

Changes made to the NAMI Recommended Animal Handling Guidelines were primarily clarifications to assist auditors making assessments onsite and/or editorial corrections. Those clarifications are summarized below.

Audit Section	Beef	Pork	Lamb	Change
Chapter 3, Section 2 – Captive Bolt Stunning			X	Updated guidance on use of captive gun placement for sheep. <i>“For use of captive bolt guns with sheep, the ideal point of entry is the highest point/top of the head. For use of firearms with sheep, there are three acceptable points of entry: the front of the head just above the eyes, the top of the head, and slightly behind the poll aiming toward the angle of the jaw (i.e. the base of the tongue).”</i>
Chapter 3, Section 2 – Gondola Loading Space Recommendations		X		Renamed the table <i>“Space Recommendations for Gondola Loading”</i> * <i>*The recommendations provided are taken from the National Pork Board’s Transportation Space Recommendations, which are an accepted guideline for gondola space.</i>
Chapter 3, Section 3 – Determining Insensibility	X	X	X	Edits completed to further clarify how to interpret signs of consciousness associated with/not associated with the respiratory system, for all stunning methods. <i>“There should be no rhythmic breathing where ribs move in and out at least twice. Agonal breathing, gasping like a fish out of water, or unusual sounds such as a moan or gasp, may be present in electric and CO2 stunned animals. It is the sign of a dying brain and is acceptable.”</i>
Chapter 4, Section 1 – Auditor Instructions for Truck Selection	X	X	X	Additional information was added to clarify how to select a proper sample for observation during the transport audit. <i>“An attempt should be made to assure the audit encompasses the entirety of the receiving process. This includes all types of trailers delivering, the differing unloading areas used, and the different shifts receiving livestock. It is not always practical that on each individual audit that all trailers and ramps be audited throughout all day/shifts.”</i>
Chapter 4, Section 3 – Scoring the Transportation Audit	X	X	X	Added guidance to make the audit instructions for the Transport Audit more consistent with that of the Slaughter Audit. <i>“For the purposes of the NAMI Transport Audit, and to maintain an acceptable level of animal welfare, a passing score on all seven of the core criteria is required. They are: 1) plant transportation policy and preparedness, 2) set-up and loading of trailer, 3) wait time to unload, 4) falls, 5) electric prod use 6) condition of animal, and 7) willful acts of abuse. The secondary audit items should not be used to determine whether a facility passes or fails an audit.”</i>
Chapter 4, Core Criterion 5 – Electric Prod Use (Transportation)	X	X	X	Text added to clarify how to score electric prod use when a prod is energized or not and when a prod is used multiple times on one animal. <i>“It is difficult to definitively determine if a prod is energized when it touches an animal. Touching an animal with a prod is scored whether or not the prod is energized. If a single animal is prodded more than once, it is still scored as one animal.”</i>
Chapter 5, Section 1 – Auditing Instructions (Plant)	X	X	X	Added a new paragraph for clarification purposes. <i>“For the purposes of the NAMI Slaughter Audit, and to maintain an acceptable level of animal welfare, a passing score on all seven of the core criteria is required. They are: 1) willful acts of abuse, 2) access to water, 3) falls, 4) electric prod use, 5) vocalization 6) effective stunning and gondola loading, and 7) bleed rail insensibility. The secondary audit items should not be used to determine whether a facility passes or fails an audit.”</i>

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Chapter 5, Core Criterion 4 – Electric Prod Use (Plant)	X	X	X	<p>Added language to clarify how to score electric prod use and to be consistent with the Transport Audit instructions.</p> <p><i>“It is difficult to definitively determine if a shock was given when a prod touches an animal. Touching an animal with a prod is scored whether or not the prod is energized. If a single animal is shocked more than once, it is still scored as one animal.”</i></p> <p>Added language in response to a question on how to score prod use in plants with multiple restrainers.</p> <p><i>“If there are two entrances to the restrainer, it is recommended that the auditor split the 100 head observed between the two lines, and evaluate electric prodding in 50 head in each single file chute leading up to the restrainer. Scoring electric prodding should be on a per-animal basis.”</i></p>
Chapter 5, Core Criterion 5 – Vocalization & Gondola Loading		X		Moved the entire “Gondola Loading” section to Core Criterion 6, Effective Stunning, after the first paragraph in the section “CO2 Stunning System Operation for Pigs.”
Chapter 5, Core Criterion 6 – Effective Stunning, CO2 Stunning Systems		X		<p>Gondola loading was moved out of the Core Criterion for Vocalization, as it created confusion about which species should be scored for Vocalization.</p> <p><i>“The efficacy of CO2 stunning is determined by insensibility after exiting the chamber. When evaluating the effectiveness of CO2, the auditor monitors whether or not an animal is rendered insensible when it emerges from the CO2 chamber as evidenced by the absence of signs of sensibility. If signs of a return to sensibility are observed, the animal must be immediately re-stunned using an immediately available backup stunner. Insensibility on the bleed rail/table is also monitored in Core Criterion 7: Bleed Rail Insensibility.”</i></p>
Chapter 5, Core Criterion 6 – Effective Stunning, Captive Bolt or Firearms	X	X	X	<p>Note added to clarify a frequently asked question on the terms “double knock” vs. “security stun.” The term “security stun” was already defined, but clarification was needed regarding whether or not the terms are synonymous, which they are not.</p> <p><i>“*The terms ‘security stun’ and ‘double knock’ are not considered synonymous. A double knock is performed when the first stun does not render the animal completely unconscious and signs of a possible return to consciousness may be observed. A security stun is performed when, even though the animal is not showing any signs of consciousness, the operator administers a second stun to ensure the animal stays unconscious and to maintain employee safety.”</i></p>
Chapter 5, Core Criterion 7 – Bleed Rail Insensibility	X	X	X	<p>Added sentence because any time an auditor sees a sensible animal on the bleed rail, it should result in a failed audit. This clarifies how auditors should address a sensible animal on the bleed rail, and is in line with Dr. Temple Grandin’s FAQs on her website.</p> <p><i>“If an auditor sees an animal that has returned to full consciousness on the bleed rail or table at any time during the audit, it should be noted and the audit failed, even if the animal observed was not part of the 100 animals scored when auditing bleed rail insensibility.”</i></p> <p>Added language to address a policy that has been in place for years, but the sentence is added to further clarify where scoring for effective stunning ends and bleed rail insensibility begins.</p> <p><i>“When a second application of the stunner is done on a sensible animal in any location before the animal is stuck, cut, or hoisted, it is counted as an ineffective stun, not as a sensible animal on the bleed rail or bleed table.”</i></p> <p>An editorial correction to ensure the Auditor Tip Box graphic reflects the text of the Audit Tool.</p> <p><i>“When a second application of the stunner is done on a sensible animal in any location before the animal is stuck, cut, or hoisted, it is counted as an ineffective stun, not as a sensible animal on the bleed rail or bleed table.”</i></p>
Audit Forms – Core Criterion 7, Bleed Rail Insensibility	X	X	X	<p>Removed rhythmic breathing and curled tongue from signs of consciousness. Also remove “no signs of return to sensibility” from the “X=completely insensible; no signs of return to sensibility” statement.</p> <p>These terms were removed from the audit form because the signs “rhythmic breathing” and “curled tongue” are only signs of possible return to sensibility, rather than signs of consciousness. Animals should only be counted as sensible or insensible on the bleed rail.</p>

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Audit Forms – Core Criterion 6, Effective Stunning Amperage		X		This change is editorial—the text was changed in the 2019 revision, but the audit form was not updated accordingly. Included the question: <i>“Is the stunner set at a minimum of 2 amps?”</i>
Audit Forms – Core Criterion 6, Effective Electrical Stunning		X		There should be three audit criteria for electric stunning: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accurate placement of electrodes 2. Effective stunning 3. Hot wanding During the 2019 revision, only “Effective stunning” and “Hot wanding” were listed on the audit form. This adds “Accurate placement of the electrodes” to the audit form as well.
Audit Forms – Core Criterion 1, Willful Acts of Abuse			X	Added “8) pulling wool, lifting sheep by the wool, or throwing sheep” to the list of willful acts of abuse. This willful act of abuse was inadvertently left out of the 2019 revision, so the correction has been made.

Visit http://animalhandling.org/sites/default/files/forms/Animal_Handling_Guide012021.pdf for more information and the complete checklists for beef, pork, and lamb operations. For questions related to the NAMI Audit, please contact the North American Meat Institute at 202-587-4200.