

Inspection of loading of spent hens at a farm near Lunteren, The Netherlands (9-10.04.2013)

---- External report ----



Summary:

Over the past 2 years, Eyes on Animals has been routinely checking on the welfare of both broilers and spent hens during transport. In the summer of 2012 we published a report, called *Cracks in the Crate* summarizing the common violations and welfare problems we regularly saw. In this report we proposed solutions to improve the situation. One of our proposals was for the chicken (broiler and egg industry) to develop new designs of transport containers that better protected the birds' welfare during loading and transport. Eyes on Animals is now in open discussion with several members from the spent-hen industry in The Netherlands and Belgium, as well as a plastic company that builds crates, to discuss what possibilities there are and what factors are important to consider in a new design. Tonight we wanted to observe the loading of spent hens into crates, to see if this would give us some new ideas on how to improve their design.

It is important to take note that despite violations occurring, we are not writing a complaint because this is a global problem, happening across Europe and other continents, to poultry. All poultry loading and transport is problematic. We now expect at least the EU industry and officials to crack down on this problem. We realize it will mean an investment of money and time as the system needs to be partly re-invented.

FACTS:

Date and time of first observation: On 09.04.2013 at 20:07 we observed three empty chicken lorries drive by near Lunteren and park at a laying-hen farm.

Address of the farm: Out of consideration for the farm managers, and their openness, we will keep this confidential. Should the NVWA or Dutch authorities like to request it, they can by emailing info@eyesonanimals.com. The point of this inspection was not to point the finger at a particular farmer, as the loading of hens and chickens is similar at all farms. We want to get to the root of the general problem and improve the situation throughout the Netherlands and rest of Europe.

Physical description of vehicle: Blue cabin, trailer with stacked poultry crates on it of various colour.

Licence plate of trailers:

URS 677
URS 679
URS 680

Transport company: Wilki (Belgian)

Observations:

The chicken catchers are made up of a group of young Dutch and Polish men. They are quick, but we do not notice any extraordinary brutal acts towards the animals, done on purpose. They seem quite serious and focused. Nevertheless, what we realize is that even if the catchers are acting professionally, loading hens at this speed and in such crates, will always cause suffering. The design of the crate needs to be improved but the speed needs to also be decreased.



These particular crates have very small loading doors at the top of the crate..

Some of the men are responsible for climbing up the aviary installation to catch the birds that are perching up high, others are responsible for stacking up the crates, putting the birds into them, and closing the door of the crates.



The catchers catch 2 birds per hand (thus 4 in total). The birds are hung upside down and passed to the man in charge of placing them into the crates. He pushes them into the crates, head first.



The catcher passes the birds, 4 at a time, to the loader.



The loader then “stuffs” 4-birds at a time through the small entrance of the transport crate.



The birds in the aviary are all making some sound, due to the excitement of what is going on. But what we definitely notice is that as soon as the group of 4 birds hit the entrance of the crate, their screams go up a notch. We notice that many get their feet, head or wings caught at the entrance of the crate door, as the group of 4 are too large to pass into this small space all at the same time. This increase in crying is likely due to the pain they feel when stuffed into the door. It is at this point of the loading process that we fear fractures to limbs are taking place. This may also explain why so many spent hens arrive at the slaughterhouse with fractures.



Sometimes the entire wing was hanging out of the loading door. If the worker is careful and takes time, he should gently fold the wing back in. But often there is not time to be careful with each bird...



Legs also get caught sticking out of the crate, in all sorts of unnatural directions, while the loader tries to stuff all 4 in at a time.



This loader was good, placing his hands over the birds to be sure no limbs or wings or heads were sticking out, before slamming the crate door shut.



Sadly, this was not the case for these birds, that Eyes on Animals and PMAF observed during other inspections (left in The Netherlands, right, in France).

00: 07 first truck (licence URS 677) is loaded and drives to nearby weigh-bridge.

It is cold outside, roughly 6 degrees Celcius. The tarps are on, but the bottom crates are not covered by it as they are not long enough.



The birds on the bottom row are not protected from the cold wind, as the tarp is not long enough.



The driver explains to us that Wilki now at least replaces all broken crates with new ones. The crates are inspected regularly upon arrival at the slaughterhouse. Crates that have many broken parts are thrown out and new ones ordered. This is something Eyes on Animals worked on with Wilki last year. We are happy to see that they took action on rectifying this problem.



Wilki crates 09.04.2013 (we did not notice any seriously broken ones, many on the truck looked new)



Wilki crates seen by Eyes on Animals during an inspection in 2011 on the highway in the Netherlands.

Violations

Infringements to the COUNCIL REGULATION (EC) No 1/2005 of 22 December 2004 on the protection of animals during transport and related operations and amending Directives 64/432/EEC and 93/119/EC and Regulation (EC) No 1255/97 took place, namely

Article 3 c, e, f.

No person shall transport animals or cause animals to be transported in a way likely to cause injury or undue suffering to them.

In addition, the following conditions shall be complied with:

(c) the means of transport are designed, constructed, maintained and operated so as to avoid injury and suffering and ensure the safety of the animals;

ANNEX I Ch. 1, pt 4

When animals fall ill or are injured during transport, they shall be separated from the others and receive first-aid treatment as soon as possible. They shall be given appropriate veterinary treatment and if necessary undergo emergency slaughter or killing in a way which does not cause them any unnecessary suffering.

ANNEX Ch. II, 1.1a, b & f.

Means of transport, containers and their fittings shall be designed, constructed, maintained and operated so as to:

(a) avoid injury and suffering and to ensure the safety of the animals;

(b) protect the animals from inclement weather, extreme temperatures and adverse changes in climatic conditions;

(f) provide access to the animals to allow them to be inspected and cared for;

Signed: L.M

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