

**Q. What rights do I have if OSHA inspects my workplace?**

**A.** You and your co-workers have the right to participate in OSHA's inspection of your workplace in several ways. **You have the right to:**

- **communicate with the OSHA officer** during the inspection (this can help the officer recognize problems),
- **talk privately and confidentially** to the OSHA inspector,
- **accept the inspector's card** with phone number (talk with your coworkers in advance about everyone taking the card so that no one stands out)
- **call the OSHA inspector** or give them your phone number, and
- **find out the results** of the inspection.

*NEBRASKA WORKER:*

*"They operated on my elbow...on my hand but there are days that I don't even know where to put my arms. They hurt me."*

*(Worker interview, Nebraska Appleseed 2009)*

**Q. What if my employer takes action against my co-workers or me because of the OSHA complaint and inspection?**

**A.** Your employer cannot punish you for reporting injuries or complaining about health and safety problems. If you or your co-workers are punished, fired, demoted, transferred, or discriminated against for exercising your safety and health rights, you have **30 days** to file a discrimination complaint with OSHA.

*(continued on back panel)*

**Q. English is not my first language. Does the local OSHA office in Omaha have someone who speaks Spanish or other languages?**

**A.** Yes. The Omaha Area Office has a bi-lingual employee who speaks Spanish, but does not have staff who speaks other languages. When you call the Omaha Area Office, ask to speak to someone who understands Spanish. Since the person who speaks Spanish is often out of the office working in the community, be ready to ask that he/she call you back. (In English: "I have a complaint in Spanish. Can someone call me back, please? This is my phone number.") When you leave your contact information, **speak slowly and repeat your name and phone number twice.**

**Q. Does OSHA ask about a worker's immigration status?**

**A.** No. OSHA will not inquire into the immigration status of workers. Everyone has the right to a safe workplace regardless of their immigration status.

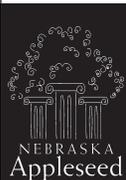
#### **Contact OSHA!**

Omaha Area Office  
444 Regency Parkway Drive, Suite 303  
Omaha, Nebraska 68114  
(402) 553-0171 or 1-800-642-8963  
(402) 551-1288 FAX  
Washington, D.C. hotline: 800-321-OSHA (6742)

Complaint forms to mail or fax (Attn. Duty Officer):  
[www.osha.gov/oshforms/osha7.pdf](http://www.osha.gov/oshforms/osha7.pdf)  
[www.osha.gov/oshforms/OSHA7\\_SPANISH.pdf](http://www.osha.gov/oshforms/OSHA7_SPANISH.pdf)

*For more information contact  
Nebraska Appleseed: 402-438-8853.  
[www.neappleseed.org](http://www.neappleseed.org)*

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## *Meat and Poultry Workers*

# **Avoid Knife Injuries on the Job!**

*NEBRASKA WORKER:*

*"The line is so fast there is no time to sharpen the knife. The knife gets dull and you have to cut harder. That's when you cut yourself."*

*(Human Rights Watch 2009)*

**Job Safety  
and Health  
It's the law!**

**OSHA**  
Occupational Safety  
and Health Administration  
U.S. Department of Labor

**Q. Why is it important for my knife to be sharp?**

**A.** Using a dull knife will cause you to use greater force, which increases your chance of several kinds of injury:

- cuts
- amputations
- stabbing wounds into your leg, arm, or body, and
- increasing joint and nerve pain from repetitive motions that can be a warning sign of permanent crippling injury.

Some people ultimately lose the ability to use their hands, arms, or back.



**Q. What can happen to me in the long term if I keep using a dull knife?**

**A.** There is a strong possibility that you could experience increased joint and nerve pain that indicates the beginning of a permanent, crippling injury. **Continuing to ignore pain** or treating it only with ice, pills, and shots – rather than fixing the root problem – **can lead to the inability to use your hands, arms, or back.** Using dull knives also makes your work much more difficult, slower, and inefficient.

**Q. Is my employer required to train me on how to use and sharpen knives?**

**A.** Yes. Federal law requires that employers must provide a safe and healthful workplace for their

employees. This law is the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act). Federal law also gives you the right to receive safety training from your employer, which in meatpacking should include how to use and sharpen knives. OSHA has additional guidelines (although these are not law) for the meatpacking and poultry processing industries. These guidelines say workers who use knives in their jobs should receive training in:

- the right way to cut meat
- how to stand and how to move to reduce stress and strain on your hands, arms, and body, and
- good knife care, including sharpening and steeling of knives regularly.

**Q. Do the OSHA guidelines for meatpacking workers recommend a particular knife sharpening program?**

**A.** No. Employers may use either individual or centralized sharpening. Employers should have a specific knife sharpening program with clear procedures to provide workers with adequate opportunity to sharpen their knives or obtain a sharpened knife at all times.

**Q. Can I ask my employer to provide me with training on how to use and sharpen knives?**

**A.** Yes. You have the right to ask your employer to provide you with training on how to use and sharpen knives. A video is not enough. **Hands-on practice and training on the line are important.** If you have a union in your workplace, you can also speak with the your union representative or your union office.

**Q. Is my employer required to provide me with personal protective equipment to prevent knife cuts?**

**A.** Yes. Workers who use knives must be provided with metal mesh gloves and aprons, and wrist and forearm guards to protect them from knife cuts.

**Q. What if my employer refuses to provide me with training on how to use and sharpen knives?**

**A.** You have the right to file a complaint with OSHA if your employer is violating any OSHA standards or for serious workplace hazards. You can file a complaint online, in writing, by telephone, or by fax. If you file a **written and signed** complaint by mail or fax, it is more likely to result in an onsite inspection. It is also okay to call OSHA before submitting a written complaint. **File your complaint as soon as possible and keep a copy.** (See back panel for contact information.)

**Q. I am concerned that my employer may take action against me if I file a complaint with OSHA. Do I have to give my name to OSHA?**

**A.** You have the right to ask OSHA to keep your name confidential, and OSHA will not tell your employer who filed the complaint or requested an inspection.

You **should** provide your name and contact information to OSHA, however, so that OSHA can follow up with you to find out if your employer fixed what you complained about.

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