Explanatory note

The current version of the *RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens* that RSPCA Assured members are required to implement is dated August 2017. As part of the on-going process of reviewing the welfare standards, they have now been amended and updated, which includes the addition of a number of new standards and guidance (information boxes).

The review process, which is undertaken in consultation with the farming industry, veterinary profession and welfare research sector, is necessary to ensure that the standards take proper account of the latest scientific research, veterinary knowledge and practical developments, and therefore continue to represent 'good practice' in farm animal care.

These changes will be incorporated into a revised edition of the *RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens*, to be issued in July 2025.

All the amendments made to the August 2017 version of the standards are listed below and have been marked with NEW or REVISED.

RSPCA Assured scheme members have until 11th July 2025 to fully implement these changes, unless otherwise stated by the standard.

Please note:

All standards in the August 2017 edition that are not shown below or are shown but do not have a NEW or REVISED next to them remain unchanged in the new edition. Due to the amendment process, some existing standards have been re-ordered and therefore re-numbered.

RSPCA Farm Animals Department

11th April 2025

Environment

Buildings

E 2.8 REVISED Birds must not have access to:

a) the droppings pit and

b) any manure belts present.

Floor and litter

E 3.6 REVISED Where birds have access to litter through internal popholes, including to a veranda, the popholes must be provided according to the minimum specification required for birds having access to the range (see R 3.2, R 3.3 and R 3.4).

Verandas

ⓘ **NEW Verandas provide many benefits for bird welfare by encouraging ranging (in free-range systems), improving litter quality in the main house, providing more space, providing natural light, and providing free-range birds with a more biosecure semi-outdoor area during periods of mandatory confined housing (e.g. during Avian Influenza housing orders). These factors can have indirect positive welfare impacts on flocks, such as reducing injurious pecking.**

Exposure to direct natural levels of UVB wavelengths can ensure the production of vitamin D3. This promotes absorption of calcium, which may help improve bone strength.

E 4.1 NEW Verandas must be installed on all barn buildings by no later than 1st May 2030.

ⓘ **NEW Due to the welfare benefits verandas provide to birds, the RSPCA strongly encourages verandas to be installed on barn buildings as soon as is practically possible.**

ⓘ **NEW The RSPCA strongly encourages verandas to be installed on all free-range buildings. The RSPCA Farm Animals Department is currently undertaking an in-depth review of this. Depending on the conclusion of this review, a phase in date for the installation of verandas on all buildings may be set.**

E 4.2 NEW Verandas must:

a) have a total floor area of at least 20% of the usable area of the main house

b) be a minimum of two metres in width and height

c) not be used in the calculated floor area for stocking density

d) provide natural air circulation and natural light to achieve an outdoor climate through openings that represent 70% of the external side wall

e) protect birds from adverse weather conditions (see information box below)

f) have a solid concrete floor, in the case of static buildings (see information box below)

g) have fully littered flooring (see E 3.3 and E 3.5)

h) be available to hens by no later than one week after placement

i) have popholes to enable full separation from the main building for climate control (see E 3.6)

j) be available to the hens according to the standard R 3.1 and R 3.1.1

k) have popholes that meet standard R 3.7 and R 3.8

l) have adequate provisions to prevent the area surrounding the veranda from flooding during wet weather

m) have an insulated roof (see information box below)

n) have an entirely waterproof roof

o) be designed to prevent access by other animals (excluding the popholes).

ⓘ **NEW In relation to E 4.2 e), adverse weather includes rain, snow, high wind speeds, and high temperatures.**

For buildings in particularly exposed positions, the use of solid material on the sides of the veranda up to the top of the popholes can be an effective way of protecting the birds from adverse weather.

In relation to E 4.2 f), including a solid concrete floor in a veranda will help to ensure litter quality can be well maintained. In the case of mobile units where a concrete floor cannot be included, further litter management or other interventions are likely to be required to ensure litter quality is maintained.

In relation to E 4.2 m), insulated roofs help provide a more preferable thermal environment for the birds and minimise condensation build-up, which will also help with litter maintenance.

ⓘ **NEW In order to comply with E 4.2 k), a veranda may be required on each side of the building to ensure the hens do not have to travel more than 20m to reach a pophole. Where verandas are required on each side of a building the total floor area of the verandas can be combined to meet E 4.2 a).**

The RSPCA strongly encourages verandas to be provided on both sides of a building.

Natural daylight

NEW Natural daylight encourages a range of activities, such as foraging and dustbathing. Providing an environment with more natural daylight also enables birds to utilise their full visual light spectrum.

In free-range systems, the addition of more natural light inside the house reduces the variation in light intensity between the inside and the outside, which encourages range use.

Practical experience suggests that it is still important to be able to manage all lighting within the house. Housing birds at greater light intensities allows more flexibility when a reduction in light levels is required as a management tool to reduce injurious pecking (see E 5.4 b)).

Due to the welfare benefits natural daylight provides to birds, the RSPCA strongly encourages natural daylight to be provided in all buildings as soon as is practically possible.

E 6.1 NEW Where required (see E 6.2, E 6.3 and E 6.4), natural daylight must be provided:

a) to give a minimum of 8 hours continuous daylight per day, except where the natural daylight period is shorter

a) by 21 weeks of age at the latest

b) through all the required openings.

NEW In relation to standard E 6.2 and E 6.3 (below), the total floor area of the house is the entire footprint of the internal floor (i.e. it excludes any veranda present) area across the whole of the house where the birds are kept.

For clarification, in multi-tier systems this is the litter area on the floor of the system (this includes the area taken up by ramps), as this represents the footprint of the bird area within the building.

For flat deck systems this is a combination of the litter area and the slatted area. This will give the total area of the poultry house where the birds are kept (this includes the area that nest boxes take up).

Essentially, if you were to clear the whole house of all furniture, then it's the total internal floor area of the building.

E 6.2 NEW For barn houses, natural daylight openings must:

a) correspond to at least 3.0% of the total floor area of the house

b) be installed by no later than 1st May 2032 for existing buildings

c) be installed in all new houses built from 1st October 2025.

E 6.3 NEW For free-range houses, natural daylight openings must:

a) correspond to at least 3% of the total floor area of the house

b) be installed at the time of an internal refurbishment

c) be installed by no later than 1st January 2035

d) be provided via the installation of windows for buildings that undergo a structural refurbishment or are built from 1st October 2025 (see information box below).

NEW **For clarification, in relation to standard E 6.3, popholes may be used to meet the 3% requirement, except where a building undergoes a structural refurbishment or when a new house is built from 1st October 2025. Where a building undergoes a structural refurbishment or a new house is built from 1st October 2025 then the 3% level is required to be met with the installation of windows, i.e. popholes cannot be used to count towards achieving the 3% requirement.**

An internal refurbishment is defined as:

- **a full system or near full system change, such as the replacement of an existing multi-tier system with a new multi-tier system or any change that results in a system being removed and then returned e.g. the replacement of nest boxes.**
- **any change to the system that results in an increase in bird numbers (e.g. the replacement of an existing flat deck system with a multi-tier system).**
- **the extension of an existing building to incorporate an additional flock.**

An internal refurbishment does not include the replacement of accessories such as drinkers, feeders, perches, or ventilation and lighting systems.

A structural refurbishment is defined as any refurbishment that involves a change to the structure of the building such as the removal of wall(s) or a change in wall or roof height. It includes any situation where planning permission is required to repair any damage to a building, e.g. when caused by fire, flood or storm damage.

If managers and/or stock-keepers are in any doubt as to whether a refurbishment meets the meaning or intention of E 6.3 b) and d) they are strongly advised to contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department for advice at the earliest opportunity to ensure compliance with this standard.

E 6.4 NEW For flocks placed from 1st October 2025, natural daylight must be provided via all popholes within the building when birds need to be housed during the natural daylight period.

NEW **With reference to standard E 6.4, natural daylight will need to enter the house through the popholes during periods where the pophole doors may need to be closed during the day, e.g. in the event of a compulsory housing order (when birds need to be housed). To achieve this, windows could be installed in the pophole doors. Alternatively, pophole doors can be opened to provide natural daylight into the house via the pophole opening. However, for the pophole door to remain open, it will be necessary to cover the pophole opening with a solid material that prevents birds accessing the range but allows natural daylight to enter the house, e.g. clear perspex.**

E 6.5 NEW To ensure that streams of natural daylight do not cause areas of bright light on the floor of the house, light openings must:

a) be of a sufficient size,

b) be well distributed (see information box below).

NEW **Natural daylight will help promote more bird activity. Therefore, ideally, the natural daylight openings should be positioned over the litter areas to encourage these positive active behaviours in these appropriate areas.**

It is recognised that it may not be possible to include all light openings over the litter areas. In such cases, the positioning of the light opening should be carefully considered to ensure that the natural daylight openings are not positioned directly over areas where the birds have a preference to rest, such as where perches are provided.

If you are unsure where best to position windows, please contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department for further advice and guidance.

NEW **Patches of bright light on the floor of the house, for example, when windows are not evenly distributed around the house, when windows are not of a similar size or when windows are too small, can attract birds to these areas. An unequal distribution of birds around the house, with increased activity in localised areas, could adversely affect litter quality and bird welfare. To ensure compliance with E 6.4, observations should take place on bright days, at different times during the day.**

E 6.6 NEW Where there are areas of different light intensity across the floor of the house there must be a gradual change in light intensity between each area.

NEW **Research has shown that chickens prefer different light intensities for the performance of different activities. Dimly lit areas provide the opportunity to rest, whilst brighter lit areas provide the opportunity to perform more active behaviours. Perches should be positioned in the dimly lit areas and it is recommended that windows providing natural daylight are positioned close to the litter areas.**

E 6.7 NEW It must be possible to readily control the amount of natural daylight entering the building to the extent that darkness can be achieved.

NEW **Installing shutters, for example, can control the amount of light entering through the light opening. Shutters can be especially important to control the ingress of direct sunlight, which could increase the risk of heat stress. The shutters can be used to block light entering the house, which is useful during catching and also at night where events outside the house could cause birds to panic. To have the greatest amount of control over the light entering the house it should be possible to open/close the shutters by varying degrees, which could be achieved manually or mechanically.**

NEW **The provision of natural daylight – particularly via windows - can increase environmental temperature within the house. Therefore it is important to consider the capacity of the ventilation system and the positioning of the ventilation inlets so that good ventilation and correct house temperature can be achieved. In the event of excessive heat, shutters can be used to block out direct sunlight. The shutters, especially if insulated, can also help keep the building warm during cold weather.**

E 6.8 NEW Where glass windows are used, these must be constructed of safety/toughened glass.

NEW **Windows constructed from two sheets of 2-ply polycarbonate (the same material and specification as that used for home conservatory construction) have been shown to work well in practice. Polycarbonate windows also appear to be better at diffusing direct sunlight within the house, helping to avoid patches/streams of sunlight.**

E 6.9 NEW Windows must be properly installed (e.g. sealed), so the correct environmental conditions (e.g. airflow) within the house can be maintained and draughts avoided.

NEW **Natural daylight can be provided in various ways, including the use of skylights, windows and/or light wells. For advice on the different ways natural light can be provided please contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.**

Space requirements and flock size

Below E 7.3

NEW **Providing birds with access to verandas (see E 4.1) will reduce the stocking density in the main house and provide more space and additional enrichment.**

The RSPCA is currently reviewing the stocking density requirement for laying hens. Higher stocking rates can contribute to welfare issues, such as injurious feather pecking and aggression. Housing birds at a lower stocking density is used as a successful management strategy for keeping intact beak flocks and we strongly encourage producers to stock birds at lower rates to provide better welfare outcomes for the birds.

Multi-tier

E 11.17 NEW Barriers that prevent birds gaining access to underneath the system must not be used, except:

a) up to the first seven days after placement (to assist with training the pullets to roost), and

b) at the time of depopulation.

NEW **In the first days following placement of birds into the house, any birds remaining on the litter after the lights have been switched off should be lifted onto the system. This will train birds to roost on the system. Practical experience suggests birds can be trained to roost on the system within three days of placement.**

The range

The RSPCA welfare standards for laying hens can be applied to barn or free-range systems. The following standards relate to range, where provided.

Management

R 1.11 NEW Except where at least one of the conditions specified in the information box below apply, all buildings that are newly approved under the farm assurance scheme applying these standards must:

a) allow birds to exit the popholes directly onto the main range area

b) have at least one third of the popholes with a minimum distance of 20m directly opposite to the perimeter of the range

c) meet b) with respect to all sides of the shed where popholes are provided.

ⓘ **NEW Although the RSPCA strongly recommends that all free-range buildings should meet standard R 1.11, this standard does not currently apply to newly approved buildings where at least one of the following conditions applied prior to 11th July 2025 and can be clearly evidenced:**

- **a written contract with an egg packer was in place to produce eggs to the previous version (August 2017) of these standards from the building(s) affected, or**
- **planning permission was submitted to erect the building(s) affected and they were specifically designed and being built to meet the previous version (August 2017) of these standards, or**
- **significant capital was invested into the affected building(s) or its infrastructure specifically in order to produce eggs to the previous version (August 2017) of these standards.**

For further advice and guidance please contact the assurance scheme responsible for assessing these standards.

ⓘ **NEW Standard R 1.11 helps ensure that hens can exit the house directly onto an open range area, rather than having to walk along narrow corridors, such as between buildings, to access the range. Providing hens with direct access to the main range is a key factor in encouraging ranging.**

The RSPCA will review bird range use on those units with existing buildings prior to 11th July 2025, operating to the previous version of this standard (August 2017), and consider the impact that full compliance with standard R 1.11 will have. This review will inform the next standards review.

R 1.12 NEW Any fencing or restrictions outside the unit must not inhibit the hens' ability to access the range area.

Shade/shelter

R 2.1 REVISED LEGAL Shade/shelter must:

a) be provided at an area of at least 8m^2 per 1,000 birds

b) be available at all times from when the hens first have access to the range

c) offer adequate protection from inclement weather and overhead predators

d) be available from a distance of no more than 20m from the popholes

e) be distributed at a minimum distribution of four shelters per hectare

f) be of sound construction, secure and not pose any welfare risks, including injury, to the birds.

Calculation of overhead shade/shelter area referred to in R 2.1 is based on the actual amount of cover provided underneath. For example, hedgerows may be included if they can provide shade at all times of day and there is enough room underneath for hen access. Where trees are deciduous or immature, supplementary shelters will need to be provided during the period in which they cannot provide sufficient cover. Trailers and simple constructions of four downward posts with a solid roof can provide acceptable forms of artificial shelter providing they can satisfy all the requirements of R 2.1.

Popholes

R 3.5 NEW For buildings:

a) currently approved by the farm assurance scheme applying these standards, where the base of the pophole is more than 45cm from the house floor (excluding the litter covering) and/or the range ground level (excluding grass height), ramps and/or platforms must be provided along the full length of the pophole for the birds to easily access the pophole.

b) that are newly approved under the farm assurance scheme applying these standards, the base of the pophole must not be more than 25cm above either the house floor (excluding the litter covering) or the range ground level (excluding grass height), except where at least one of the conditions specified in the information box below apply.

NEW **Although the RSPCA strongly recommends that all free-range buildings should meet standard R 3.5 b), this standard does not currently apply to newly approved buildings where at least one of the following conditions applied prior to 11th July 2025 and can be clearly evidenced:**

- **a written contract with an egg packer was in place to produce eggs to the previous version (August 2017) of these standards from the building(s) affected, or**
- **planning permission was submitted to erect the building(s) affected and they were specifically designed and being built to meet the previous version (August 2017) of these standards, or**
- **significant capital was invested into the affected building(s) or its infrastructure specifically in order to produce eggs to the previous version (August 2017) of these standards.**

For further advice and guidance please contact the assurance scheme responsible for assessing these standards.

NEW The RSPCA strongly recommends that all free-range systems meet standard R 3.5 b). A maximum height of 25cm to the base of the pophole enables birds to have a clear view of the range and aids movements between the inside of the house and the range area. This will encourage more birds outside onto the range area where they will be able to perform important natural behaviours.

R 3.6 NEW LEGAL In relation to standard R 3.5 a) where:

a) platforms are to be included within the calculated usable area, they must be at least 30cm wide

b) ramps are present, if the area underneath the ramps is to be included within the calculated usable area, they must have a headroom of at least 45cm.

R 3.9 REVISED The maximum distance travelled by a hen to reach the nearest pophole in the main building, in order to access the range or a veranda (where present) must not exceed 20m.

Natural cover and enrichment

R 5.1 REVISED Natural cover must be provided:

a) in the form of existing or newly planted trees/shrubs/other canopy forming plants,

b) at an area equal to at least 5% of the total range area (this may include natural cover meeting the requirements of R 2.1),

c) at an area equal to at least 20% of the total range area by 1st May 2027.

Biosecurity

R 6.1 NEW A written Housing Confinement Contingency Plan must be:

a) developed:

i. with advice from your vet

ii. to safeguard the welfare and behavioural needs of the birds during periods of confinement

b) included in the VHWP.

R 6.2 NEW The Housing Confinement Contingency Plan must be implemented for free-range birds during periods of confinement, for example when there is a high risk of spread of a contagious disease and the government requires birds to be housed.

R 6.3 NEW The Housing Confinement Contingency Plan must detail:

a) the additional biosecurity measures that will be implemented to protect the birds, where there's a high risk of spread of a contagious disease

b) the additional/novel enrichment items that will be provided to promote activity and interest, including, the:

   i. type of items

   ii. number of items

   iii. management of the items

c) how the litter will be managed to prevent heavily worn or poached areas forming

d) dustbathing provisions, including, the:

   i. type of provision

   ii. material/s used

   iii. management of the provisions

e) the actions to be taken if high levels of aggression and feather pecking occur (see section 4 of Appendix 5).

Management

A high degree of caring and responsible management and stockmanship is vital to ensure good animal welfare. Managers and stock-keepers need to be thoroughly trained, skilled and competent in animal husbandry and welfare, and have a good working knowledge of their system and the livestock under their care.

Managers

M 2.5 REVISED Managers must:

a) develop and implement contingency plans and preventative measures for the following emergency situations, to help ensure the welfare of the animals can be safeguarded:

i. fire

ii. flood

iii. interruption of supplies to the farm, e.g. feed

iv. notifiable disease outbreaks

v. mass on-farm culling, e.g. due to an outbreak of avian influenza where all birds in a house/on the farm need to be culled (see information box below)

vi. periods where the animals are required to remain on the farm for longer than planned, e.g. where there is a significant delay in animals being taken to the abattoir

b) provide an emergency action board sited in a prominent position that is visible to all farm staff and emergency services, which must include:

i. the procedures to be followed by those discovering an emergency

ii. the location of water sources for use by the fire services

iii. the what3words address and postcode for location of the unit.

NEW A contingency plan is a course of action designed to help a business respond effectively to a significant future possible event/situation.

For each event/situation, the plan includes the potential impacts on the animals and the actions that can be taken to address the issues identified. For example, in the event of an abattoir breakdown that results in the animals having to remain on farm for longer than planned, contingency plans will detail:

- **the potential issues caused by this event and the implications to the welfare of the animals**
- **the actions that can be taken to safeguard the animals' welfare.**

NEW With regards to M 2.5 a) v), avian influenza has become more prevalent in recent years, resulting in an increased incidence of mass on-farm culling of poultry. Contingency plans are required to ensure that mass culling can be carried out without delay, effectively and humanely. Contingency plans should include:

- **details of the on-farm mass culling method/s that can be used**
- **access routes for specialist vehicles and equipment to the poultry buildings**
- **any additional biosecurity measures required**
- **actions to be taken to ensure bird welfare is protected up to the point of death (e.g. feed and water provision, lighting schedule and ventilation and climate checks)**
- **the building preparations required for instances where whole house gas killing may be required**

The RSPCA strongly recommends that all poultry buildings are designed to deliver effective and humane whole house gas killing as a last resort, to prevent the need to use less humane culling methods.

The RSPCA will be developing future standards in this area to ensure on-farm mass culling is effective and humane.

Protection from other animals

M 6.1 NEW A written Wild Animal Control Plan (WACP) must be:

a) in place, and

b) implemented on farm.

M 6.2 NEW Levels of potentially harmful wild animals (e.g. rodents and birds) must be managed humanely to avoid:

a) the risk of disease spread to livestock

b) damage to livestock buildings and the services on which livestock depend

c) contamination and spoilage of feed.

NEW In England and Wales, the following legislation applies to the management of wildlife:

- **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**
- **Animal Welfare Act 2006**
- **The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010**
- **Protection of Badgers Act 1992**
- **Pests Act 1954**
- **The Spring Traps Approval (England) Order 2012**
- **The Spring Traps Approval (Wales) Order 2012**
- **The Small Ground Vermin Traps Order 1958**
- **Food and Environment Protection Act 1985**
- **The Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986**
- **Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act 1962**

Equivalent legislation applies in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

M 6.3 NEW The primary means of protecting livestock from wild animals, as documented in the WACP, must be by:

a) physical exclusion methods

b) the removal of elements in the vicinity that might encourage the presence of wild animals

c) maintaining units in a clean and tidy condition to minimise the risk of wild animals gaining access to the unit.

NEW Physical exclusion measures are the most humane and effective methods of providing protection from wild animals.

Measures should only be applied after the area has been checked and cleared of elements that could encourage the presence of wild animals, as applying some measures can interfere with rodent behaviour and encourage them to spread to other areas. Humane methods of protecting livestock from other animals include:

- **construction/maintenance of fencing appropriate for excluding the wild animals in question**
- **removal of shelter/cover (e.g. weeds, heaps of rubble, broken equipment etc.) in the area surrounding livestock buildings**
- **removal/protection of obvious food sources**
- **maintenance of drains**
- **maintenance/proofing of buildings against wild animals**
- **storing away from livestock.**

In free-range systems it is appreciated that elements, such as natural cover, are provided in order to encourage birds on to the range. Some of the methods listed above are intended to remove unnecessary and unintended harbourage sites, as opposed to elements specifically provided for other purposes.

NEW Rodents are less likely to inhabit an area if there is no cover or food supply. Reduced food availability will also increase the likelihood of rodents consuming bait, where applied. When stores or livestock buildings are empty, the opportunity should be taken to clean spaces and introduce any necessary controls before restocking.

M 6.4 NEW Where any method of lethal control is being considered, a site survey of the unit must be carried out before applying the control, i.e. bait or traps, identifying:

a) the type, level and extent of the problem species

b) any non-target animals likely to be present (including pets and children)

c) any maintenance and proofing issues.

M 6.5 NEW Where any lethal method of control is used, its use must have taken into account the results of the site survey (see M 6.4).

M 6.6 NEW The WACP must include provisions that specifically exclude the following methods of control:

a) snaring

b) gassing

c) vertebrate glue traps.

M 6.7 NEW Long-term baiting must not be used as a routine rodent control measure.

NEW In relation to M 6.7, site plans should therefore highlight potential high risk areas for wild animal activity (rather than permanent baiting locations).

NEW The RSPCA is opposed to the use of poisons that cause animal suffering and it is important not to rely solely on the use of rodenticide. The RSPCA is concerned about the welfare of all animals that have the capacity to suffer, and therefore all alternative forms of deterrent and humane control should be exhausted before resorting to the use of poisons for rodents.

NEW Any baiting programme should be considered carefully and justified in risk assessments for each location where used. Consideration should be given to using non-toxic baits in order to ascertain the presence of rodents, which may necessitate the use of rodenticide.

M 6.8 NEW When bait and/or traps are used, records of their use must be kept and:

a) state the location of the bait/traps

b) state what bait/traps were used

c) state the volume/number of bait/traps placed

d) state the name of the person who placed the bait/trap

e) be retained for at least two years.

M 6.9 NEW Bait and traps must:

a) be placed in suitable positions, and

b) be sufficiently protected to avoid harming non-target animals.

M 6.10 NEW Bait must be used according to the manufacturer's instruction for:

a) storage

b) usage, including areas of use and replenishment

c) disposal.

M 6.11 NEW Traps must be:

a) used according to the manufacturer's guidelines

b) maintained in good order

c) disposed of appropriately if no longer fit for purpose, e.g. have broken

d) stored safely and securely.

M 6.12 NEW Bait points must:

a) be monitored regularly, and

b) records or monitoring must be kept, including:

i. levels of any activity at each bait point

ii. any missing or disturbed bait

iii. the name of the person responsible for monitoring the bait points.

M 6.13 NEW Trap points must:

a) be monitored at least twice a day, ideally at dawn and dusk, and

b) records of monitoring must be kept, including:

i. levels of activity at each trap

ii. any missing or disturbed traps

iii. the name of the person responsible for monitoring traps.

M 6.14 NEW Any injured, sick or dying wild animals found – that have been targeted for control – must be humanely dispatched immediately to prevent further suffering.

Regular replenishment of bait will help to prevent sub-lethal doses, which can result in a build-up of resistance to the active ingredient.

M 6.15 NEW Where bait is used, dead animals must be disposed of safely, in line with the manufacturer's product label.

Safe disposal of wild animals that have died as a result of poisoning reduces the risk of secondary poisoning in non-target species, such as domestic and other wild animals (including birds), that may consume the carcasses.

M 6.16 NEW Once treatment is complete, all traps and traces of bait must be:

a) removed

b) disposed of/stored according to the manufacturer's instructions.

M 6.17 NEW Wild animal control methods must be covered by the farm COSHH assessment, where required.

M 6.18 NEW Managers must ensure that all stock-keepers:

a) have access to a copy of the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use *UK Code of Best Practice: Best Practice and Guidance for Rodent Control and the Safe Use of Rodenticides*

b) are familiar with its content

c) understand and apply its content.

NEW Managers are encouraged to complete a training course that is approved by the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use. Such courses are available at: www.thinkwildlife.org/training-certification/#int_lnk

Further information is available on the AHDB website ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/rodent-control-on-farms

M 6.19 NEW Domestic animals must not have access to the inside of the poultry building.

M 6.20 NEW Farm dogs and cats must not be permitted in the laying hen house.

M 6.21 NEW Farm dogs and cats that have access to the laying hen site must be:

a) in a healthy condition

b) regularly wormed (record to be kept in the medicine book or VHWP).

Pullets

PLEASE ALSO REFER TO THE *RSPCA WELFARE STANDARDS FOR PULLETS (LAYING HENS).*

It is strongly advised to liaise closely with the rearer and visit the pullets.

Producers are advised to look for single-breed, established flocks of calm, robust pullets and to ensure that the environment and types of facilities in the rearing and laying unit are as closely matched as possible. This can include floor, perch and litter type, lighting and feeding times, temperature at the time of placement and access outside if possible for free-range. Pullets should also be in good health, at target bodyweight and uniform in size.

All of these elements can help the birds adjust on arrival at the laying hen house and to minimise stress. This has been shown to help reduce the risk of injurious feather pecking occurring later in the birds' life.

M 7.1 REVISED All pullets must be:

a) reared according to the *RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)*

b) sourced from a rearing unit that has been approved by the certification scheme assessing against these standards as being compliant with the *RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)*.

M 7.2 REVISED All pullets destined for a multi-tier laying unit must be:

a) reared according to the multi-tier standards within the *RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)*

b) sourced from a multi-tiered rearing unit that has been approved by the certification scheme assessing against these standards as being compliant with the *RSPCA welfare standards for pullets (laying hens)*.

It is strongly recommended that all pullets required for single tier laying houses are sourced from rearing houses that provide some slatted areas and facilities on different levels. Evidence and experience suggests that this can result in birds that more quickly settle in to their laying environment, more easily use and access facilities on a raised slatted area and roost on the slatted/perching areas at night. This in turn can help to minimise any stress.

Artificial intelligence

NEW **The RSPCA is reviewing the role of artificial intelligence and the wide-ranging benefits it can bring to farm animal welfare, particularly in the areas of monitoring growth parameters, behaviour change and welfare assessment. It is strongly recommended that producers investigate the feasibility of such technology to further safeguard animal welfare. Where such technology is being considered, please contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department.**

Health

The environment in which livestock are housed needs to be conducive to good health.

Health and welfare monitoring

H 1.12 REVISED In relation to H 1.11 (monthly feather loss monitoring requirement), where there is early indication of feather pecking and/or feather loss and by no later than when the total percentage feather loss exceeds the threshold values given in Section 2 of Appendix 5 :

a) the Feather Cover Action Plan must be implemented (see H 1.15, H 1.15.1)

b) action(s) must be taken immediately to:

i. rectify the issue(s) (see information box below, and Section 4 of Appendix 5 for further information), and,

ii. prevent the issue(s) recurring

c) details of the action(s) must be recorded on the feather loss monitoring record sheet (see Appendix 5).

H 1.12.1 REVISED With respect to H 1.12 b), where action(s) implemented in the previous month has not alleviated the feather loss problem, alternative and/or additional action(s) must be taken.

H 1.15 NEW A written Feather Cover Action Plan must be:

a) developed for each flock:

i. before placement

ii. with advice from your vet, and

b) included within the VHWP (see Standard H 1.1).

H 1.15.1 NEW The Feather Cover Action Plan must detail:

a) the additional actions that could be implemented if early signs of feather pecking and/or feather loss are identified (see Appendix 5, Section 4 for help with this)

b) the additional/novel enrichment items that will be provided to promote activity and interest, including the:

   i. type of items,

   ii. number of items

   iii. management of the items

c) how the litter will be managed to prevent heavily worn or poached areas forming

d) how the birds can be further encouraged onto the range

e) how to further promote full range use

f) a review of the potential causes or stressors that may have resulted in feather pecking and/or feather loss

g) a review of the previous flock's feather cover to end of lay

h) successful management strategies from previous flocks that can be applied to the current flock.

ⓘ **NEW The Feather Cover Action Plan (see H 1.15 and H 1.15.1) is required to detail management strategies that can be applied to each flock if early signs of feather pecking and/or feather loss are identified. Implementing the plan at an early stage will help to address the behaviour before severe feather pecking/feather loss is seen.**

H 1.16 NEW A written protocol that minimises the welfare issues associated with young laying hens laying large eggs must be:

a) developed before the placement of each flock

b) developed with advice from your vet

c) included within the VHWP for each flock (see standard H 1.1)

d) implemented at the time of placement of the pullets.

H 1.17 NEW With reference to H 1.16, the protocol must include:

a) the monitoring of bird weight to ensure birds are at the appropriate weight when they come into lay

b) the monitoring of flock evenness to ensure all birds are at a similar weight when they come into lay

c) a lighting plan to ensure the appropriate timing of sexual maturity

d) the steps taken to ensure a smooth transition from the lighting regime in rear to the lighting regime provided in the laying shed

e) a record of the lighting regime at rear.

Beak trimming

H 2.1 Where chicks are beak trimmed, this procedure must only be carried out on chicks no older than 24 hours using infrared equipment (see *RSPCA welfare standards for hatcheries*), unless in accordance with H 2.4.

NEW The RSPCA is developing these standards in several areas, with the aim of prohibiting the beak trimming of birds. For example, new standards will require birds to be provided with natural light, as well as more space (via the installation of verandas).

The RSPCA plans to phase out beak trimming within the next five years. The RSPCA will be reviewing practical experience with intact beak birds and welfare outcome assessment data, including feather cover scores, to help inform the inclusion of an appropriate date from which beak trimming will be prohibited.

Producers that are managing good feather cover in consecutive flocks are strongly encouraged to trial intact beak birds.

The RSPCA strongly encourages producers to focus resources into achieving good feather cover to facilitate a smooth transition to the requirement to have fully intact beak flocks as soon as possible.

Medication

H 3.7 NEW Antibiotics must only be used when necessary, and always used responsibly.

NEW Prevention is better than cure, and it is the implementation of prevention strategies alongside the adoption of farming practices that prioritise and promote animal health and welfare that are key in reducing antibiotic use.

For more information on this issue, please see our information sheet, *Antimicrobial resistance and farm animal welfare*, available on our website (www.rspca.org.uk).

H 3.8 NEW The prophylactic use of antibiotics is not permitted.

NEW Prophylactic treatment is intended to prevent sickness or disease developing in a group of healthy animals where a veterinary surgeon has identified that there could be a high risk of bacterial infection. We believe that, in poultry, there should be no need for the prophylactic use of antibiotics when following these standards. However, we acknowledge there may be very exceptional circumstances, e.g. in the case of an emergency, such as a transport accident, where a veterinary surgeon may feel it is in the best interests of the affected animal's welfare for antibiotics to be given preventatively. We would expect these occasions to be extremely rare and limited to only one flock.

Metaphylactic treatment is intended to control disease spreading in groups of animals where some are already showing clinical signs of disease and is not covered by standard H 3.8.

H 3.9 NEW The use of antibiotics on-farm must be reviewed annually and this review must form part of the VHWP (see H 1.1).

H 3.9.1 NEW In light of the findings of the antibiotic use review (see standard H 3.9) an action plan must be drawn up aimed at reducing the use of antibiotics on the farm through improvements in animal husbandry.

H 3.9.2 NEW When reviewing the use of antibiotics on-farm, the following must be included in the action plan (see Standard H 3.9.1):

a) the different classes of antibiotic drug used

b) which group(s)* of animals were treated, and for which condition(s)

c) the number of animals treated per occasion

d) the total amount of each individual drug within a class that was used in % bird days (actual bird days treated/100 bird days at risk)

e) a specific section covering all the above for 'Critically Important Antibiotics' (CIAs).

*A group of animals refers to animals of a similar age and/or stage of production.

NEW The review is intended to highlight which groups of animals are suffering from particular diseases and therefore aid the development and implementation of targeted prevention strategies.

Transport

The depopulation process and transport systems need to be designed and managed to ensure livestock are not caused unnecessary distress or discomfort. The transport and handling of livestock needs to be kept to an absolute minimum. Personnel involved in depopulation and transport need to be thoroughly trained and competent to carry out the tasks required of them.

Depopulation

Below T 1.20

NEW The RSPCA is considering alternative handling methods for end of lay hens at depopulation.

Poultry do not have a diaphragm and carrying the birds by the legs can result in respiratory distress (birds having difficulty breathing).

The size and design of some poultry housing systems can result in birds being carried by the legs for extended periods of time. When designing new systems, the practical aspects of depopulation should be considered.

An upright catching and carrying method has been used successfully under commercial conditions in some European countries.

We strongly encourage birds to be carried in an upright position and we are currently examining the feasibility of achieving this.

T 1.26 REVISED When modules are used for transport:

a) the top drawer must be loaded first unless the module manufacturer's instructions state otherwise and bird welfare is not compromised

b) each drawer must be closed carefully to ensure that the birds' heads, wings and legs are not trapped in any way.

Slaughter/killing

All slaughter/killing systems need to be designed and managed to ensure livestock are not caused unnecessary distress or discomfort. The pre-slaughter handling of livestock needs to be kept to an absolute minimum. Personnel involved in the slaughter need to be thoroughly trained and competent to carry out the tasks required of them.

Management and training

S 2.1 REVISED Contingency plans and suitable back up procedures and systems must be in place to:

a) deal with occasions when unavoidable delays may occur, such as a mechanical breakdown, and it is not possible to process the birds as planned

b) ensure the continued killing of animals in the event of an emergency that threatens the ongoing use of the main system, such as a disruption to the supply of gas in the case of gas killing systems.

S 2.8 REVISED Managers, in conjunction with the PWO must:

a) develop and implement a training programme for all staff involved in the handling and slaughtering/killing of laying hens, and

b) ensure that these staff are trained and competent to carry out their duties.

c) only mark staff training as completed once a self-declaration of competence has been signed by both the trainee and management staff.

ⓘ REVISED **For staff undertaking the following operations, a certificate of competence in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009[1] can be used to demonstrate compliance with standard S 2.8 b):**

a) the handling and care of animals before they are restrained;

b) the restraint of animals for the purpose of stunning or killing;

c) the stunning of animals;

d) the assessment of effective stunning;

e) the shackling of live animals;

f) the bleeding of live animals.

[1]Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing, Article 7, Paragraph 2.

S 2.9 NEW When developing the staff training programme (S 2.7 a)) the following areas must be included, as appropriate:

a) laying hen welfare

b) laying hen behaviour

c) handling and movement of laying hens

d) lairage, including lairage conditions and care of laying hens during lairage

e) restraint of laying hens

f) slaughter/killing method/s, including emergency back-up methods

g) assessment of an effective stun/kill

h) bleeding.

NEW In relation to S 2.9, the Humane Slaughter Association (HSA) '*Poultry Welfare – Taking Responsibility*' training package can be used to help inform the content of the training programme.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)

Below S(TV) 1.5

NEW The RSPCA is currently reviewing Intelligent Camera Surveillance systems for use in slaughter plants. These systems can alert relevant slaughter plant staff to potential welfare concerns in real time, allowing situations to be dealt with quickly and efficiently. They can also be used to identify areas where staff require additional training or where staff safety is at risk. It is strongly recommended that slaughter plants adopt such technologies to help further safeguard animal welfare in their plant. Where such technology is being considered, please contact the RSPCA Farm Animals Department for further information.