

Newly Revealed Documents Show Sloppy Heatstroke “Depopulation” Method at Iowa Chicken Facilities

Birds Endured Excessive Suffering During Mass Killings Conducted in Response to Bird Flu, Advocates Say

Des Moines, IA, August 2, 2023 – Today, the animal protection organization [Animal Outlook](#) released [documents](#), newly obtained under Iowa’s Open Records Law, which advocates say show that a controversial method of mass killing farmed animals caused even more suffering than previously believed, due to sloppy use of the method. Ventilation Shutdown Plus (VSD+) involves shutting off all sources of ventilation in a facility and pumping in heat or steam until the animals die—after suffering immensely—from suffocation or heat stroke. [The documents released today](#) show that instances of VSD+ at Iowa chicken facilities to control outbreaks of avian influenza failed to work as planned due to inadequate implementation of the method. Today, Animal Outlook [challenged redactions of key information in these records](#).

“VSD+ should never be used in the first place. It’s hard to imagine a worse way for animals to die, even when VSD+ is used ‘correctly.’ Yet these records show that, somehow, incompetent implementation has made the process even worse,” said Animal Outlook Staff Attorney Jareb Gleckel. “This is the nature of animal agriculture. You can’t raise and slaughter animals for food without causing widespread suffering. We can all choose to not be part of it, by leaving animals off our plates.”

Though, according to the USDA, which is responsible for such “depopulations,” VSD+ is only permitted to be used in extreme circumstances—which is a particularly torturous form of mass killing, even as compared to other methods—it has been used throughout the country, [including in Iowa](#), to kill millions of farmed animals. The documents released today detail instances of VSD+ used at six facilities in Buena Vista County, Iowa. In each instance, some birds remained alive after being subjected to between one and a half and nearly five hours of VSD+. The remaining

animals were killed either by gassing or having their skulls manually or mechanically severed from their spinal columns.

Even more alarming, says Gleckel, the documents reveal instances in which VSD+ was ineffective due to poor insulation and “lack of attention to detail” when wrapping the barns to cut off air flow. The upshot, Gleckel says, is that a mass killing method that is already controversial because it causes immense and prolonged suffering inflicted *even more* suffering on the animals at these Iowa facilities, because the barns were not compatible with the method from the outset and the method was not implemented properly.

In turning over records to Animal Outlook, Iowa’s Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship has redacted the number of animals killed during VSD+ and the number still living afterwards. Today, [Animal Outlook challenged the Department’s decision to redact this information](#).

“There’s no legitimate reason for withholding these numbers,” says Gleckel. “In our view, all these numbers will show is how ineffective VSD+ is at killing animals. The public is entitled to this information.”

Previously, in a separate public records request, [Animal Outlook obtained research protocols, photographs](#), and [approximately 10 hours of video footage](#) from experiments, funded by the industry trade group U.S. Poultry and Egg Association, studying the effects of ventilation shutdown on chickens. In the footage, chickens writhe, gasp, pant, stagger, and even throw themselves against walls in a desperate attempt to escape. Eventually the birds collapse and, finally, die from heat and suffocation.

When animal agriculture facilities kill animals en masse after detecting a bird flu infection, the federal government compensates the company for the loss. The documents released today by Animal Outlook, regarding the extermination of birds at Iowa facilities, include references to federal reimbursements to the facilities following VSD+ mass culling.

In addition to mass killing to control bird flu infections, the animal agriculture industry has used VSD+ to kill large numbers of animals, [including pigs in Iowa](#), when facilities were unable to send the animals to slaughter due to COVID-19 slaughterhouse shutdowns.

[Read more about today’s filing here.](#)

ABOUT ANIMAL OUTLOOK

[Animal Outlook](#) is a national nonprofit 501(c)(3) animal advocacy organization based in Washington, DC, and Los Angeles, CA. It is strategically challenging animal agribusiness

through undercover investigations, legal advocacy, corporate and food system reform, and disseminating information about the many harms of animal agriculture, empowering everyone to choose vegan. <https://animaloutlook.org/>

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