INCIDENT
In late December 2018 WorkSafe ACT attended a butchery retail premises in Canberra where a 22 year old male apprentice sustained a serious injury to his hand and fingers whilst operating a meat tenderiser machine. A photo of a typical tenderising machine is at the end of this Alert.

The apprentice’s fingers and hand were dragged into the blades of the tenderiser while feeding meat into the machine for processing. His hand jammed between the cutting rollers causing significant crushing and lacerations to his fingers. Compounding the injury was the length of time required to disassemble the device to allow removal of his hand by emergency services. The male apprentice’s injuries will require significant medical intervention as well as lost time off work.

Initial findings are that a protective guard was not being used at the time as per the manufacturer’s instructions for safe use of the machine.

It is important that all guarding devices/shielding equipment are used when working with any slicing or meat processing machines, such as those found in most butchering premises.

RISKS
Workers can sustain serious injuries causing significant time away from work and potentially loss of fingers and limbs when impacted by fast moving and sharp cutting machinery utilised in food processing commonly found in butcher shops, delicatessens, abattoirs and other meat processing businesses.

There are no circumstances under which operation of cutting, slicing or tenderising food processing devices can be carried out without all safety guards being attached and in good working order. Before any food processing work is carried out utilising such devices, you must ensure that the machine is being used in accordance with the safety instructions as outlined in the manufacturer’s operational manual; all staff are competently trained; and all safety equipment is fully functional.

MITIGATING THE RISKS
Only competent people should carry out food processing on cutting, slicing and/or tenderising devices. Any parts that are deemed unserviceable should be clearly labelled to prevent use, and replaced or repaired prior to any use.

If you are a person conducting a business or undertaking where workers are required to operate such cutting, slicing or tenderising machinery, you must ensure that:

- an appropriate safe system of work is in place
- workers are suitably trained and competent to perform the task.
- make sure all machines have guards attached and workers always use them when operating the equipment;
- instruct workers on the safe use of machinery, including what equipment is to be used for specific tasks;
- if applicable, redesign machines so they cannot be operated without guards in place;
- ensure "off" buttons/switches are readily accessible;
- use a last slice device or pusher to prevent injury at the cutting section;
- ensure that equipment is securely fixed to the bench;
- warning signs displayed at all machines;
- sufficient space is provided for the operator around machines;
- apprentices must be under appropriate supervision to use or clean machinery;
- remind staff not to distract colleagues who are using machinery;
- remind staff to do pre-use checks on machinery guards and to follow the safe system of work for clearing blockages, being especially sure to turn off the machine before doing so;
- ensure butchers' steels for knife sharpening have hand guards; and
- regularly inspect and have your equipment serviced to make sure it has not been damaged (this may also improve productivity by reducing downtime of equipment). Repair faulty equipment as soon as possible.

Poor machine guarding practices are one of the greatest contributors to workplace injuries in meat food processing. Inadequate machine guarding can result in tragic consequences – loss of fingers, hands or worse. Machine guarding is vital to every workplace that uses machinery – guards need not be complicated nor interfere with productivity.

Business owners are reminded of their obligation to comply with Work Health and Safety legislation ensuring that the workplace is a safe environment for all workers, customers and visitors; that is safe from harm and personal injury at all times.

Manufacturer’s instructions on safe use of a meat tenderiser device is referred for information: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7B6tra-OkAs
A photo of a typical tenderising machine follows: