

The Animal Welfare Act: Research Facilities

The U.S. Congress passed the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) in 1966. Since then, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has vigilantly enforced this Act to ensure the well-being of animals used in laboratory research. APHIS enforces standards for animal husbandry, recordkeeping, the review of research protocols, and veterinary care.

The AWA covers nearly all species of warmblooded animals used in research. An amendment to the AWA in 2002 excluded birds, mice of the genus *Mus*, and rats of the genus *Rattus* bred for use in research. The AWA does not regulate animals used in elementary or secondary education or farm animals used in agricultural research.

Animal Husbandry

Research facilities using regulated animals must register with APHIS and provide their animals with proper treatment and a healthy and safe environment. Research facilities must provide their animals with water and a balanced diet of wholesome food, clean and structurally sound housing that affords enough space for the animals to move comfortably, and protection from extremes of temperature and weather.

The AWA places additional requirements on facilities housing animals with special needs. For example, facilities with nonhuman primates must provide environmental enrichment, such as swings, toys, and regular interaction with other primates or a familiar caregiver. This enrichment enhances the primates' psychological well-being. Facilities must also provide dogs with an opportunity for exercise and follow guidelines for the care and use of farm animals in nonagricultural studies.

Veterinary Care

To ensure that research facilities provide their animals with proper veterinary care, APHIS requires that they employ an attending veterinarian who is located on the premises or who makes regularly scheduled visits. The facility must also establish a program of veterinary care that includes procedures for the administration of vaccines, regular examinations, and the care of sick animals. Researchers using regulated animals must follow professionally accepted standards of humane

treatment and use, which includes administering pain-relieving medication or anesthesia for procedures that cause more than momentary pain or distress, unless withholding those agents is scientifically justified. Further, the program must include provisions for the humane euthanasia of animals, in accordance with American Veterinary Medical Association recommendations.

Recordkeeping

To ensure that cats and dogs used in research are obtained legally, APHIS requires that all dealers who sell animals to research facilities must breed the animals themselves or obtain them from other licensed dealers, pounds, or shelters. APHIS also requires research facilities and dealers to maintain detailed records indicating the source of their dogs and cats.

Review of Research Protocols

The AWA requires that each research facility establish an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) to oversee the humane care and use of regulated animals. It is important that the IACUC consider the general public's concerns for the welfare of animals used in research, as well as the needs of the facility. Therefore, the committee must be composed of at least three members, including a person unaffiliated with the facility and a veterinarian familiar with laboratory animal medicine.

One of the IACUC's functions is to review research protocols to ensure that they comply with the AWA requirements. These requirements state that researchers must consider alternatives to procedures that may cause more than momentary or slight pain or distress to the animals. The IACUC must also ensure that activities do not unnecessarily duplicate previous experiments.

Enforcement

APHIS officials inspect research facilities at least annually to ensure compliance with the AWA. On these unannounced inspections, APHIS officials review the facility's animal enclosures and husbandry practices, programs of veterinary care, animal acquisition records, research protocols, and IACUC records. If the officials find any items that are not in compliance with the law, they document the items and give the facility a time-frame for correction, or, in cases of severe neglect or repeat violations, immediately initiate enforcement action. Such action can include monetary penalties, corrective cease-and-desist orders, or confiscation of the animals. APHIS may also consider innovative

settlements for facilities that show an interest in improving conditions for their animals.

Cooperative Efforts

The AWA stipulates that all laboratory personnel involved in research projects must receive training and instruction in humane care and handling of the species they work with, aseptic surgical techniques, the proper uses of anesthetics and tranquilizers, and the use of services available to provide information on alternatives to animal research.

To assist research facilities in this endeavor, Congress established the Animal Welfare Information Center (AWIC) at the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, MD. AWIC conducts literature search workshops several times a year to educate researchers. The Web site is located at www.nal.usda.gov/awic. APHIS' relationship with AWIC and the research community is a broadly supported effort to produce a searchable Internet database source on alternatives to animal experimentation. The Johns Hopkins University Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing manages the Web site, <http://altweb.jhsph.edu>, to assist researchers.

Additional Information

For additional information on APHIS' oversight of animals used in research, contact APHIS' Animal Care headquarters at:

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