



University Committee on Animal Care

Policy on Social Environment of Laboratory Animals

The Guide states that single housing of social species should be the exception. Social housing is considered as the default method of housing unless otherwise justified based on social incompatibility resulting from inappropriate behavior, veterinary concerns regarding animal well-being, or scientific necessity approved by the IACUC. When necessary, single housing of social animals should be limited to the minimum period necessary and, where possible, visual, auditory, olfactory and, depending on the species, protected tactile contact with compatible conspecifics should be provided. In the absence of other animals, additional enrichment should be offered, such as safe and positive interaction with the animal care staff, as appropriate to the species of concern; periodic release into larger enclosures; supplemental enrichment items; and/or the addition of a companion animal in the room or housing area.

The Eighth Edition of the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals describes enrichment of the environment by:

- (1) compatible social housing of animals whenever possible
- (2) enrichment of the macro-environment through the use of contact bedding, novel foods, toys, and other aids to minimize boredom
- (3) avoiding the use of wire or slotted bottom cage systems

A wide variety of animal species are maintained by ETSU for the purpose of biomedical research and teaching. Whenever possible we will provide at least one or more of the types of environmental enrichments listed above. Experimental criteria may prevent the use of enrichment methods in some cases. In these situations an exemption to this plan must be obtained from the UCAC. The following narrative describes the plan for each species currently housed at this institution.

Mice - In most cases mice are housed in social groups such as breeding pairs, dam with pups, or multiple animals of the same sex. Pregnant animals, post-surgical animals, or dominant aggressive males may require individual housing in order to safeguard their welfare or the welfare of their cohorts. Nestlets, a compressed cotton product that is readily shredded by mice to make nests, are provided to mice in addition to contact bedding. Pregnant dams and dams with litters are often also provided with mouse "huts". Mice may also be given Enviro-Dri.

Rats - The majority of rats are housed in socially compatible groups. Any individually housed rat will be provided with a ~6 inch segment of 4" PVC pipe. Pregnant dams and dams

with litters are provided with Enviro-Dri bedding material to facilitate nest building in addition to the standard contact bedding and are given a “loft”.

Guinea Pigs - The animals will be socially grouped unless contraindicated by the study and approved by the UCAC. Guinea pigs are housed in suspended stainless steel or plastic cages with contact bedding. Each cage also contains one or more ~6 inch segment of 4” PVC pipe to provide a hide area for the animals.

Rabbits - All rabbits are currently singly housed. Once a week each animal will be offered alfalfa cubes.

Dogs - All dogs are pair housed in runs that meet or exceed the floor space requirements. The runs allow for auditory and visual contact with other dogs. If a dog is single housed without sensory contact with other dogs, an attendant will positively interact with the dog daily for at least 30 minutes. An SOP for exercise of dogs has been developed and is in effect.

Approved by the UCAC: December 14th, 2006

Reviewed and approved: February 8, 2022