



Policy on Social Housing of Animals

In order to comply with the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (Guide)*, the Public Health Service Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (PHS Policy), and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidance, the University of Georgia's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (UGA IACUC) has adopted the following policy regarding social housing and the subsequent justifications for single housed animals. This policy statement is consistent with the UGA IACUC Policy on Provision of Space to Animals. The UGA IACUC considers the social housing requirements provided in the following benchmark documents as minimums:

1. The USDA Animal Welfare Act Regulations and Policies
2. The ILAR (NIH) *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* (2010)

According to the *Guide*, single housing of social species should be the exception. Social housing will be considered the default method of housing unless otherwise justified based on social incompatibility resulting from inappropriate behavior, veterinary-related concerns regarding animal well-being, unavailability of appropriate social companions or scientific requirements approved by the UGA IACUC.

In the case of single housing of social animals, it will be limited to the minimum period necessary and, where possible, visual, auditory, olfactory and, depending on the species, protected tactile contact with compatible conspecifics will be provided.

In the absence of other animals, enrichment will 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 to accommodate the aforementioned contact.

Socially housed animals should have sufficient space and structural complexity to allow them to escape aggression or hide from other animals in the pair or group. This will come in the form of perches, visual barriers, shelters, and/or elevated shelves, depending on the species in question. Conversely, singly housed animals may require more space per animal than social housed animals and will be provided with this space to meet performance outcomes and regulatory requirements.

Justification for deviation from the social housing policy will be documented in the protocol prior to the start of an experiment in the case of scientific requirements and experimental necessity. If the URAR Veterinarians or the Attending Veterinarian deems single housing necessary for veterinary concerns regarding animal well-being, this will be documented in the animal health record. Exceptions to the need to document individual cases in the animal health record include: breeding purposes, such as to

prevent overcrowding or to prevent mating; an animal that is the only member of that experimental group, such as through attrition of a group of mice in one cage during an experiment; animals not covered by the USDA Animal Welfare Act that need to be separated due to aggressive behavior such as adult male mice; and unrelated male rabbits. While every effort should be taken to obtain littermates of adult male rabbits for social housing in long term experiments, those males that have been singly housed at the vendor or are not littermates may be singly housed to prevent aggressive behavior.

For animals that have been single housed for prolonged periods prior to the implementation of this policy, behavioral assessment and monitored pairing by trained veterinary and/or animal care staff will take place in order to deem social housing safe and appropriate and to match compatible animals with one another. If social housing is deemed appropriate for these individuals, monitoring will continue to take place to ensure no veterinary related concerns arise. If incompatibility is noted between any or all of these individuals, the safest and most appropriate contact will be provided as well as environmental enrichment for their well-being.

It is recommended that the enclosures of social animals that are singly housed be labeled, with the reason for single housing denoted. URAR provides unique index cards to designate an animal as singly housed.

UGA's exceptions for single housing (i.e., cases of single housing not justified in the protocol or covered by this policy) will be reviewed on a semi-annual basis by the IACUC and/or Attending Veterinarian as appropriate.

References

1. AAALAC, International. Position Statement on Social Housing. July 2011.
(<http://www.aaalac.org/accreditation/positionstatements.cfm>).
2. Institute for Laboratory Animal Resources, National Research Council, Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, 8th Edition, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 2010.
3. United States Department of Agriculture, Animal Welfare Act Regulations (http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/awa_info.shtml) and USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Policies (http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/policy.shtml) (http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare/downloads/awr/awr.pdf).