Title: Husbandry Care of Ground Squirrels

I. Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to outline the minimum standards of care for ground squirrels (family Sciuridae).

II. Policy:

All units providing animal care for squirrels must meet or exceed these minimum requirements based on the USDA Animal Welfare Regulations (AWR), the ILAR Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (Guide), and the Public Health Service Policy (PHS). Deviations or exceptions must be approved by the Attending Veterinarian and the IACUC.

III. Procedure:

**Daily (365 days a year without exception):**

- Observe each animal and check for health concerns (AWR 2.33).
- Ensure adequate feed and potable water is available (Guide pg. 65-68).
- Record sick and dead animals, and report them to Campus Veterinary Services (CVS) or designated clinical veterinarian per standard operating procedure for reporting sick or dead animals.
- Record minimum and maximum temperatures and humidity.
- When housed indoors, change heavily soiled cages (Guide pg. 69-70).
- Clean and organize rooms, anterooms, and surrounding areas, including removing encroaching vegetation around outdoor enclosures.
- Record daily completion of tasks, initial, and date log sheet.

**Weekly (not to exceed every 7 days):**

- Provide clean water and food bowls (Guide, pg. 70).
- Clean and disinfect metal burrow boxes, then add 3 inches of fresh bedding material.

**As Needed:**

- Chow must be discarded after 6 months of the milling date (Guide pg. 66) unless manufacturer guidelines recommend a shorter or longer expiration date.
• Disinfect the animal room including walls, floors, and ceilings (if possible) (Guide pg. 72).
• Outdoor enclosures should be cleaned regularly to prevent excess buildup of spider webs, leaf litter, and other extraneous materials.

**Identification**

• Squirrels must be individually identified in addition to having an appropriately labeled cage card (Guide pg. 75) (See Identification of Animals policy).
• Individual animal health records will be maintained for all weaned animals.

**Environmental Enrichment:**

• Refer to the Environmental Enrichment policy.
• Ground squirrels should be provided with the ability to demonstrate species typical behaviors (Guide pg. 52).
• Devices must be checked regularly for wear and discarded when safety hazards are present (Guide pg. 72).
• Devices used for environmental enrichment must be easily sanitized or disposable.
• Some examples of appropriate enrichment for ground squirrels include nest boxes, social housing, and food enrichment.

**Facilities**

• Temperature alarms must be installed in all rooms housing ground squirrels (Guide pg. 143).
• Adequate ventilation must be provided for the health and comfort of the animal at all times, by means of windows, doors, vents, or air conditioning and shall be ventilated so as to minimize drafts, odor, and moisture condensation. (AWR 3.126)
  o A minimum of 10-15 fresh room air exchanges per hour shall be provided in animal housing areas (Guide, pg. 46).
  o Auxiliary ventilation, such as exhaust fans and vents or air conditioning, shall be provided when ambient temperature is above comfortable levels (AWR 3.126)
• Floors shall be moisture-resistant, non-absorbent, impact-resistant, and relatively smooth (Guide, pg. 137). Refer to Physical Plant and Facilities Maintenance policy.

**Housing:**

• Caging/Enclosures must be in good condition, free of any damage that may cause injury, and escape proof.
• Cage sizes must provide sufficient space to allow each animal to make normal postural and social adjustments with adequate freedom of movement (AWR 3.128)
• Outdoor enclosures should provide sufficient protection from environmental extremes, such as shade structures, nest boxes, and wind breaks (AWR 3.127)

*When housing this species, please also refer to the Animal Care Program’s Standards of Care Policy on Pest Control, Identification and Labeling of Cages, Environmental Enrichment, Food*
Storage, House-Keeping in Facilities Housing Biomedical Research Animals, Physical Plant Facilities Maintenance, as well as the IACUC's Policy on Social Housing of Social Species.