

Policy: SC-32-100
Date: 05/30/2019
Enabled by: IACUC/AV/
ILAR/APHIS
Supersedes: 07/24/2015

Title: Husbandry Care of Rabbits

I. Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to outline the minimum standards of care for rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*).

II. Policy:

All units providing animal care for rabbits 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.
 - Temperature range for rabbits is 61°F to 72°F (Guide p.44)
 - Humidity range for rabbits is 30% to 70% (Guide p.44)
- Check automatic watering systems.
- Change heavily soiled or flooded cages and/or drop pans (Guide pg. 69-70).
- For wire hanging cages without drop pans, hose floors to remove excreta (Guide pg. 69-70).
- Spot clean floors and walls of cages and pens. If hosing is required, remove rabbits from pens or caging unless sufficient space is available for the animals to remain dry (AWR 3.56).
- Clean and organize rooms, anterooms, and surrounding areas (AWR 3.56).
- Record daily completion of tasks, initial, and date log sheet.

Weekly (not to exceed every 7 days):

- Provide clean water bottles and sipper tubes (Guide, pg. 70).
- Provide clean drop pans with clean bedding or absorbent paper (AWR 3.56).

Biweekly (not to exceed every 14 days):

- Clean and disinfect primary enclosure, feed and water receptacles (*AWR 3.56*).
- Provide clean rabbit cages and racks for cage housed animals (*Guide pg. 70*).
- Move floor housed animals to an unused pen with clean bedding material and shelters (*Guide pg. 70*).
- Clean and change environmental enrichment.

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*).

Identification

- Rabbit's must be individually identified in addition to having an appropriately labeled cage card (*Guide pg. 75*) (See Identification of Animals policy).
- Rabbits can be permanently identified with an ear tag, ear tattoo or micro-chip (*Guide pg. 75*).
- If rabbits are microchipped, the reader must be readily available and functional.

Environmental Enrichment:

- Refer to the Environmental Enrichment policy.
- Rabbits 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 rabbit's include: Nylabones, plastic balls, wood blocks (on chains or floor cage), nesting boxes, exercise pens, and oat hay.
- Females with a litter less than one month of age must be provided a nest box (*AWR 3.53*).

Facilities

- Temperature alarms must be installed in all rooms housing rabbits (*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. (*AWA 3.51*)
 - A minimum of 10-15 fresh room air exchanges per hour shall be provided in animal housing areas (*Guide, pg. 46*).

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- Auxiliary ventilation, such as exhaust fans and vents or air conditioning, shall be provided when ambient temperature is 85 F or higher. (AWA 3.51)
- 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 (*AWR* 3.50).
- Females housed for longer than 6 months must will be socially housed unless deemed inappropriate by the veterinary staff (*Guide* pg. 64).
- Space requirements:

Weight of Adult (kg)	Floor Area/Animal (ft ²)	Floor Area/Female + Litter (ft ²)	Height (in)
<2.0	1.5	4.0	16
2.0-4.0	3.0	5.0	16
4.0-5.4	4.0	6.0	16
>5.4	≥5.0	7.5	16

(*Guide* pg.59)(*AWR* 3.53)

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.