

Policy: SC-32-100  
Date: 4/1/2022  
Enabled by: IACUC/AV/  
ILAR/APHIS  
Supersedes: 05/30/2019

**Title: Husbandry Care of Rabbits**

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I. Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to outline the minimum standards of care for rabbits.

II. Policy:

All units providing animal care for rabbits must meet or exceed these minimum requirements based on the USDA Animal Welfare Regulations (AWR) and the ILAR Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (Guide). 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 findings to Campus Veterinary Services (CVS) or designated clinical veterinarian per standard operating procedure for reporting sick or dead animals.
  - Record/document minimum and maximum temperatures and humidity on the daily log.
  - 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 each task, initial each task, and date the log.

**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, vents, and ceilings (if possible) at least every 6 months or when room changes species. (Guide pg. 72).
- Nail trims and hair brushing are performed as needed.
- Each facility will develop their own best practices with sanitization typically occurring every 6 months or whenever there is a change in species but may vary with facility.

**Identification**

- Rabbits 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 ([SOC-30-102](#)).

**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).
  - 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 SOC 50-102.

**Housing:**

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- 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).
- Females with a litter less than one month of age must be provided a nest box (AWR 3.53). They must be placed in the cage towards the end of her pregnancy so she can make a nest with her fur.
- Space requirements:

| Weight of Adult (kg)    | Floor Area/Animal (ft <sup>2</sup> ) | Floor Area/Female + Litter (ft <sup>2</sup> ) | 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) |                                      |   |             |