I. Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to outline the minimum standards of care for opossums (*Monodelphis domestica*).

II. Policy:

All units providing animal care for opossums 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 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 opossums is 68°F to 79°F (*Guide* pg. 44).
  - Humidity range for opossums is 30% to 70% (*Guide* pg. 44).
- Change any excessively soiled or flooded cages (*Guide* pg. 70).
- Clean and organize room, anterooms, and surrounding premises (*Guide* pg. 72).
- Record daily completion of tasks, initial, and date log sheet.

**Weekly:**

- Provide clean static caging (*AWR* 3.31 & 3.131).
- Provide clean catch pans for wire-floor caging (*Guide* pg. 70).
- Provide clean bottles and sipper tubes (*Guide* pg. 70).
- Clean automatic water delivery valves (i.e. lixits) at cage change (*Guide* pg. 72).

**Biweekly (not to exceed every 14 days):**

- Provide clean individually ventilated cages (*AWR* 3.31 & 3.131).
• Clean automatic water delivery valves (i.e. lixits) at cage change (*Guide pg. 72*).

**As needed:**
• Disinfect the animal room including walls, floors, and ceilings (if possible) (*Guide pg. 72*).
• Remove and replace worn or damaged equipment from primary enclosures and surrounding facility (*Guide pg. 72*).
• Chow must be discarded after 6 months of the milling date unless manufacturer guidelines recommend a shorter or longer expiration date (*Guide pg. 66*).
• Clean and sanitize feed storage containers (*Guide pg. 67*).

**Environmental Enrichment:**
• Refer to the Environmental Enrichment policy.
• Opossums should be provided the opportunity to demonstrate species typical behavior. Examples of enrichment for opossums include shelters (*Guide pg. 53*).
• Devices must be checked regularly for wear and discarded when safety hazards are observed.

**Facilities:**
• Temperature alarms must be installed in all rooms housing opossums (*Guide pg. 143*).
• Adequate ventilation must be provided for the health and comfort of the animal at all times.
  o A minimum of 10-15 fresh room air exchanges per hour shall be provided in animal housing areas (*Guide pg. 46*).
• Floors shall be moisture-resistant, non-absorbent, impact-resistant, and relatively smooth (*Guide pg. 137*). Refer to Physical Plant and Facilities Maintenance policy.

**Housing:**
• Floor space taken up by food bowls, water containers, and enrichment devices should not be considered part of the floor space (*Guide pg. 56*).
• Space requirements for opossums should provide sufficient space to allow each animal to make normal postural and social adjustments with adequate freedom of movement.

*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.*