

## **Safety and Facilities Personnel Handout**

This information sheet is being supplied to you to help assist you in understanding risks faced in the conduct of your job at The University of Toledo (UT). This information has been developed with the assistance of the UT Division of Laboratory Animal Medicine, Office of Health and Safety and the Office of Occupational Medicine. Questions and concerns should be directed to any of the units.

The use of animals for research and teaching is closely controlled by both UT and external agencies. The primary research funding agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), have detailed guidelines covering all aspects of animal care and research use. UT adheres to these guidelines in order to be eligible for the research funds. The UT Health Science Campus (HSC) is also accredited by an independent, international association that reviews animal care and research programs. This group is called the Association for the Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC) and is somewhat similar to the JCAHO accreditation that involves the UTHSC Hospitals. There are two UT committees, one located on each campus, that oversees all animal care and use. That committee is called the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) and is made up of faculty (both animal researchers and non-users), lab animal staff, and area community representatives. The IACUC reviews, and recommends changes to research plans that involve the use of animals. The IACUC also has general responsibility for all animal care that occurs at the animal facilities located on each campus.

Each of these agencies has, as a component of their oversight of animal use, a concern about the safety and welfare of humans involved in animal use. This concern is derived from the fact that there are health and safety issues related to animal use that may be unique to the person's job responsibilities. A general overview of these risks is supplied to all persons with some exposure (see "What You Should Know About Health Risks When Working With Laboratory Animals"). For persons without direct animal use responsibility but who work in the animal facility in the context of other responsibilities, this handout has been produced and supplied. It briefly describes circumstances that could arise within the animal facility and how to respond to minimize health and safety risks.

**Contact Information:** Lab animal personnel are present in the departments M-F, 7:30 am- 5:00 pm. Staff is present on the HSC for basically the same hours on weekends and holidays; staff is present for limited hours at the Main Campus (MC) animal facility. The departments encompass a large area and it can be difficult to find the staff. During normal work hours there are usually personnel in the lab animal office area that can assist you. During work hours on weekends and Holidays, the phones in the HSC

hallways can be used as an intercom (follow the directions on each phone) to call for assistance. Arrangements for weekend assistance on the MC should be made during the week. **The Campus Police on both campuses have contact information for the Lab Animal staff for after-hours contact.**

**General Environment:** Working in lab animal spaces represents a very low general risk as compared to any other work environment.

**Loose Animals:** The vast majority of the animals used at UT are rats and mice bred specifically for research. As specifically bred animals, they have a highly controlled genetic makeup and have been raised for many generations in clean, controlled environments. Outside of rare cases (mentioned below), the animals represent no particular health and safety hazard should they be found loose. In fact, they are considerably safer to be around than are wild rodents.

**Single Loose Rodent:** Report sightings to lab animal staff in person or in writing (such as a note left in a prominent place). As noted above, these are rarely a hazard to personnel but they can risk causing disease or research problems so the lab animal staff tries to control them. Should the animal be captured, **do not** place it in a cage with other animals or into any animal room it wasn't found in. Bites should be avoided and reported if they occur.

**Several or Many Loose Rodents:** Such a problem would be an **emergency** in the lab animal operation. Contact lab animal personnel as soon as possible (x4310 on HSC; x1987 on MC).

**Loose Animals Other Than Rodents:** Few non-rodents are kept or used at UT and many of these are also bred specifically for research. To be in a room with a loose animal generally represents no particular hazard. In rare cases, some animals may carry bacteria or viruses that are harmful to humans and contact of this sort should be mentioned to your physician if you become ill shortly after the exposure. Loose non-rodents do represent a greater personal hazard than do rodents in terms of bites and scratches. Thus contact should be avoided. Loose non-rodents are a welfare concern of the animal lab and should be reported to lab animal staff as soon as possible.

**Hazardous Materials:** Some research projects involving animals also include hazardous materials. These may include dangerous chemicals, radioactive materials and infectious disease agents. When hazardous materials studies are conducted, the animal rooms are clearly marked as such. In some cases, the warning signs are on the wall with the room number sign. Never enter a room of this type until instructed on what the hazard is and if and what the personal protective measures are that should be followed. The lab animal Unit Manager should be consulted for

guidance. Health and Safety should be contacted for questions and concerns related to work in these animal rooms.

**Allergies:** Allergies are covered in more detail in another document (see "What You Should Know About Health Risks When Working With Laboratory Animals"). Although there are very rare individuals that have severe allergic reactions to laboratory animal exposure, periodic "incidental" work exposure is very unlikely to lead to development of significant laboratory animal allergy. However, tightness in the chest or throat or difficulty in breathing when in the animal facility can represent a severe allergic reaction and can occur in rare individuals simply by walking through the hallways. Such problems are very serious and should be discussed with an Occupational Medicine physician.

**Slick Floors:** In order to assure quality animal research, the lab animal staff invests a lot of effort in cleaning and disinfecting of the department. The facilities are constructed of smooth surfaces that can be readily cleaned. Taken together, this means that the floors are apt to be slippery, especially when wet. Care must be taken whenever moving through the department, especially when floors are wet or signage indicates a hazard.

**Spills:** The materials that are apt to be found as a spill in the animal lab are such things as animal bedding or cleaning soaps. These are not particularly hazardous. However, some hazardous chemicals are used in the animal facility either by the department or by the researchers using the animals and thus contact with spilled materials needs to be avoided. Animal husbandry staff normally do the housecleaning duties in the area (i.e. UT Housekeeping only cleans the office area) and spills should be reported to animal lab management..

**Animal Rights and Security:** Some individuals in our society are strongly opposed to the use of animals in research. Every year there are incidents of break-ins, thefts, and vandalism in animal research facilities. These can be extremely destructive, costing institutions millions of dollars and can irreparably damage decades of research. In many cases, animals have been stolen and killed or released to die outdoors. Such a break-in could occur at UT. Care must be taken to keep doors closed and locked. Luckily, there have been no serious injuries to persons in the US thus far in these attacks but those conducting the attacks must be considered very dangerous. Suspicious persons and activities must be promptly reported to the Campus Police (x3770 on HSC; x2600 on MC).