



Policy on Environmental Enrichment for Rabbits, Rodents, and Ferrets

Background: Animal well-being is essential to the quality of research in which animals are used. Management for optimal animal well-being provides an environment that permits animals to grow, mature, and reproduce, maintains good health, and minimizes variation. Adequate and appropriate physical environment and housing for animals includes consideration of suitable enrichment (*Guide, 1996*).

Policy: All rabbits, ferrets, and rodents will be housed in groups whenever possible. Males of these species may need to be singly housed in order to prevent fighting. Rodents housed individually should be provided enrichment that promotes species-specific behavior, such as supplemental nesting material or chewable objects. Rabbits and guinea pigs housed individually, without additional enrichment structures in their cages, should be provided either: a chewable or manipulative object that can be replenished or sanitized on a weekly basis, or supplemental bedding such as straw. Ferrets housed individually should have, as minimum enrichment, structures such as PVC tubes for hiding and climbing. These should be sanitized weekly.

Exceptions: It is recognized that scientific goals in some disciplines such as behavioral, toxicological, and nutritional research, may be confounded by additional bedding or cage structures. Also, while enrichment may result in many positive developmental and physiological changes (*Benefiel, Dong, and Greenough; 2005*), enrichment may also result in changes such as aggressive behavior or adverse effects to reproduction (*Benefiel, Dong, and Greenough; 2005*) that adversely influence some types of research. Investigators who believe that enrichment materials may confound their research objectives must provide scientific justification in order to exclude enrichment materials from the housing environment. Exceptions to this policy must be reviewed and approved by the DAR veterinary staff and referred to the IACUC for committee review and action as appropriate.

Reference(s):

- Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (Guide), NRC, 1996
- Benefiel, Dong, and Greenough. 2005. Mandatory “Enriched” Housing of Laboratory Animals: The Need for Evidence-Based Evaluation. *ILAR Journal* 46(2):95-105.

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