WVU IACUC POLICY:
Social Housing of Research Animals

Introduction

Social housing of research animals involves the housing of social animal species in pairs or groups in order to provide visual, auditory, olfactory, and/or tactile contact and facilitate natural species-typical, social behaviors. Social species are those known to naturally live and interact with conspecifics, including most rodents, rabbits, companion animals, sheep, goats, pigs, nonhuman primates, and aquatics. When properly managed, social housing of research animals can significantly enhance their overall welfare.

The purpose of this policy is to define housing standards for social species of research animals at West Virginia University.

Regulations and Guidelines

The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, 8th ed. states that “Appropriate social interactions among members of the same species (conspecifics) are essential to normal development and well-being. When selecting a suitable social environment, attention should be given to whether the animals are naturally territorial or communal and whether they should be housed singly, in pairs, or in groups. An understanding of species-typical natural social behavior (e.g., natural social composition, population density, ability to disperse, familiarity, and social ranking) is key to successful social housing.” (p64)

The AAALAC Position Statement on this topic: “The Guide states that single housing of social species should be the exception. Social housing will be considered by AAALAC International as the default method of housing unless otherwise justified based on social incompatibility resulting from inappropriate behavior, veterinary concerns regarding animal well-being, or scientific necessity approved by the IACUC. When necessary, single housing of social animals should be limited to the minimum period necessary and, where possible, visual, auditory, olfactory and, depending on the species, protected tactile contact with compatible conspecifics should be provided. In the absence of other animals, additional enrichment should be offered, such as safe and positive interaction with the animal care staff, as appropriate to the species of concern; periodic release into larger enclosures; supplemental enrichment items; and/or the addition of a companion animal in the room or housing area. The institution’s policy and exceptions for single housing should be reviewed on a regular basis and approved by the IACUC and/or veterinarian.”

Policy

Full time social housing is the preferred and expected method of housing social research animal species at WVU unless otherwise justified based on 1) social incompatibility resulting from inappropriate behavior, 2) veterinary or animal welfare concerns, or 3) scientific necessity approved by the IACUC.
Single housing of social animals should be used only when necessary and for the minimum period required, and it should include visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile contact with conspecifics whenever possible. Single housing that excludes contact with other animals requires the provision of additional enrichment, such as interaction with animal care staff, periodic supervised access to a larger enclosure, and supplemental enrichment items.

**Exemptions**

Protocol-related exemptions from social housing require scientific justification described in the protocol and approved by the IACUC. These exemptions must be included in the semi-annual report to the Institutional Official, which will be reviewed and approved by the IACUC.

The Attending Veterinarian or designee may exempt animals from social housing on an individual basis for veterinary or social incompatibility reasons. Veterinary exemptions must be documented in the animal’s clinical record every 30 days unless the exemption is permanent.

Program-wide exemptions to social housing may be granted by the IACUC, including the single housing of: 1) breeder males, 2) peri-parturient females; 3) single-sex littermate at weaning; 4) animals fasted pre-anesthesia; 5) animals during post-operative recovery; or 6) animals lacking socially compatible cage-mate. Other program-wide exemptions may be approved by the IACUC as warranted.

**References**


AAALAC International's Position Statement on Social Housing, [http://www.aaalac.org/accreditation/positionstatements.cfm#social](http://www.aaalac.org/accreditation/positionstatements.cfm#social)

AAALAC FAQ on Social Housing and Social Experience, [http://www.aaalac.org/accreditation/faq_landing.cfm#C6](http://www.aaalac.org/accreditation/faq_landing.cfm#C6)