

Frequently Asked Questions on *Best Practices* and the Responsible Use of Animals in Research

Q: What does SfN hope to achieve by releasing this document?

Research is the key to scientific and medical innovation. But researchers are facing increasing threats, violence and intimidation around the world. Researchers should know that they and their colleagues are able to conduct their work and ensure their families are safe.

We hope this document spurs conversations between federally-funded scientists, who are typically the targets of extremists, and their administrations about improvements to current policies that would better protect the scientists. The document builds upon the excellent UCLA Task Force report of 2007, which was developed in response to a significant increase in the harassment of its faculty. SfN believes these recommendations will assist universities in responding to illegal harassment and violence, in turn providing a greater sense of security to scientists involved in controversial research.

Q: What is your plan for achieving these goals? What constitutes success?

We are asking our leadership and members to contact the administrators at a selection of top NIH-funded institutions and success will be defined on a few levels. The conversations occurring are a success, but ultimately, we would hope that the recommendations are incorporated into the emergency plans of research institutions.

Q: Are these incidents a significant enough problem that institutions need new rules and procedures? Why is this plan originating from SfN?

Incidences of harassment and violence against researchers have increased significantly in recent years. Through the Best Practices, SfN present to universities a set of recommendations designed to facilitate better coordination with local government and law enforcement and the media. While universities have the primary responsibility for protecting their colleagues, as a scientific society representing a field in research using animals is vital to progress on a host of disorders, we feel a responsibility to address the safety of our members.

Q: Do any of your recommendations inhibit animal activists' First Amendment rights to free speech?

No. SfN respects everyone's right to free speech and believes strongly in the right to peaceful expression of diverse opinions. However, the continuing intimidation, violence, and additional threats to which biomedical researchers have been subjected are far beyond the bounds of acceptable discourse and debate. The recommendations contained in the Best Practices are intended to protect researchers from illegal, violent acts such as vandalism and physical attacks. It is not the intent of SfN to infringe in any way on Constitutionally-protected rights.

Q: Is animal research really that necessary? Why can't animal research be replaced by modeling and simulation?

Animal systems provide insights into human systems because of the similarities between the genetic and physiological systems of animals and humans. Medical and scientific advances achieved through animal research are frequently supplemented by knowledge obtained through non-animal methods, but there is no complete alternative to animal research. The day may come when animal research is no longer necessary, but for now, the most advanced technology simply cannot mimic the complex cellular interactions that occur within a living system.

Q: Why are so many animals used in research?

The scientific and medical research communities of the US adhere to “The Three Rs”—reduction, replacement and refinement. Research techniques should:

- Reduce the number of higher species used
- Replace animals with other models whenever possible
- Refine tests to ensure the most humane conditions possible

The number of animals used in research has decreased in the past 20-25 years. Estimates for the reduction in the overall use of animals in research during the past 25 years range from 20% to 50%. This reduction is even greater for non-rodent species. For example, best government estimates report that the number of cats used in research has dropped by two-thirds since 1967

Q: Is there any oversight of researchers using animals?

Federal regulations governing the care and use of animals in biomedical research are more extensive than those covering human research subjects. All research institutions are required by law to establish an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) to justify their need for animals; select the most appropriate species and use the fewest number of animals possible. Habitat and medical issues are enforced through the Animal Welfare Act.

Q: Don't you care about the well being of animals?

For humane, compassionate and scientific reasons, researchers are deeply concerned about the condition of the animals they study. It is well recognized that animals have been indispensable to the cause of medical and scientific research. We have a moral duty to provide them the best care and treatment possible.

Q: Does the research cause pain?

First, the majority of animal research inflicts no more than slight or momentary pain or distress, such as an injection. In a small percentage of cases where neither anesthesia nor pain medication can be used (to avoid interference with research results), pain is minimized as much as possible. Second, pain and distress are widely thought to have a negative impact on the immune system. So it's in the interest of the researcher to protect animals from undue stress.

Q: Do your animals come from shelters or people's homes?

Despite accusations to the contrary, there is no evidence that dogs and cats are taken from homes and shelters for sale to laboratories. Scientists neither need nor want to do research on pets. The overwhelming majority of research animals are bred specifically for research, with most of the remainder acquired directly from the “death row” of animal pounds.

FAST FACTS

- Nearly all research animals are rodents—mice and rats—bred specifically for research. Dogs, cats and non-human primates together account for less than one percent of the total.
- Animal research for animal health has resulted in many life-saving and life-extending treatments for cats, dogs, farm animals, wildlife and endangered species.
- The 1999 USDA Annual Report reveals that 55 percent of all research procedures with animals involved no more than slight or momentary pain or distress (i.e.: an injection). Thirty-six percent of the research procedures employed anesthesia and postoperative painkillers.
- Some achievements of animal research:
 - Smallpox has been eradicated from the face of the earth.

- Over 553,000 men and women have, and survive, coronary bypass surgery each year.
- The 420,000 patients who receive hip and knee replacements each year no longer face confinement in wheelchairs or great difficulty and pain when walking.
- More than 1,200 leukemia patients, many of them children, receive life-saving bone marrow transplants each year.