

Assistance for Members Under Attack

For immediate assistance, contact SfN's Director of Policy and Advocacy at advocacy@sfn.org or (202) 962-4000

Scientists cannot always anticipate when an animal activist group will question or attack their research. One indication that a scientist's research is being considered for an attack is notification that his or her grant application and reports (if federally funded) have been requested under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Under the current guidelines, virtually the entire grant application file must be released to the requester. The funding agency will inform the researcher that their grant materials have been petitioned. Researchers should view this as a warning and prepare themselves and their institutions for an attack.

The method(s) these groups use to stop or impede research may range from inflammatory letters in local newspapers to destructive laboratory break-ins. Many SfN members have been attacked through an unannounced distribution of printed material to their host institutions, to representatives of the federal, state and local governments, and to the neighborhood in which they reside. These leaflets usually contain glossy brochures in which so-called "experts" disparage inaccurate descriptions of research.

Whatever the form of attack, there are steps researchers can take should their research come under attack or if they feel their research is being reviewed by an animal activist group.

1. Contact the proper officials within the institution (IACUC, security, media/public relations).
 - Notify the institution's Animal Care and Use representative of concerns;
 - Discuss the institution's plan for handling these incidents and which precautions should be taken:
 - Review the animal use file and make sure all necessary information on the project is documented and updated;
 - Identify the type of crisis, location (if appropriate), names, and number of people involved;
 - Determine what information still needs to be collected and reviewed;
 - Specify what responses will be given to specific allegations, confirm who the designated spokesperson is, and determine the type and timing of press releases.
 - Notify security at the institution;
 - Notify the institution's media/public relations office;
 - Animal rights activists will often try to elicit damaging comments about animal research; work with the research institution to identify a plan for responding to media inquiries and reaching out to the media.
2. Inform the funding agency's project officer of concerns as soon as possible.
 - Officials within the funding source can provide researchers with support, such as letters highlighting the importance of the research, documentation of compliance with federal legislation on the care and use of animals.
3. Inform SfN and other professional societies.
 - Contact SfN's Director of Policy and Advocacy at advocacy@sfn.org or (202) 962-4000
 - Contact the National Association for Biomedical Research (NABR) at nabr@info.org or (202) 857-0540