POLICY

The UNMC/UNO IACUC promotes environmental enrichment and psychological wellbeing of all species used in research at UNMC and UNO through the use of social interaction, environmental stimulation, and exercise to enhance animal wellbeing, minimize animal stress, promote consistency and comply with regulatory requirements. Animals housed at UNMC or UNO will be provided with species appropriate opportunities to express species specific behaviors that meet or exceed regulatory requirements.

The IACUC recognizes that the environment may influence the validity and reliability of research experiments. The environment consists of physical attributes (e.g., temperature, lighting, exercise, cage specifications) as well as social interactions and dietary supplements. Opportunities to exhibit species-typical behaviors and activity will be considered and implemented within all justified scientific constraints or veterinary based limitations.

UNMC Comparative Medicine (CM) Program and the UNO Animal Care Program under the direction of the Attending Veterinarian(s) (AV) develop and maintain Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) and Guidelines which serve as the basis for the animal enrichment and/or exercise program. The SOP(s) are reviewed by the IACUC during the semiannual program review and are available to Investigators in consultation with the AV(s).

REGULATIONS

Animal Welfare Act in accordance with, (9 CFR Ch. 1), Part 3 – Subpart A 3.7 Compatible Grouping - Dogs and cats that are housed in the same primary enclosure must be compatible with all restrictions listed in 3.7 (a-e) 3.8 Exercise requirements for Dogs are specified in the AWA. Dealers, exhibitors, and research facilities must develop, document, and follow an appropriate plan to provide dogs with the opportunity for exercise.

Subpart D 3.81 The AWA mandates “environment enrichment” for nonhuman primates by specifying that there must be a “program for the psychological well-being of nonhuman primates”. Dealers, exhibitors, and research facilities must develop, document, and follow an appropriate plan for environment enhancement adequate to promote the psychological well-being of nonhuman primates. The plan must be in accordance with the currently accepted professional standards as cited in appropriate professional journals or reference guides, and as directed by the attending veterinarian. This plan must be made available to APHIS upon request, and, in the case of research facilities, to officials of any pertinent funding agency. The plan, at a minimum must address each of the following: (a) Social Grouping, (b) Environmental Enrichment, (c) Special Considerations, (d) Restraint Devices, (e) Exemptions.

The Guide 2011, 8th Edition - The primary aim of environmental enrichment is to enhance animal well-being by providing animals with sensory and motor stimulation, through structures and resources that facilitate the expression of species-typical behaviors and promote psychological well-being through physical exercise, manipulative activities, and cognitive challenges according to species-specific characteristics (NRC 1998a; Young 2003). Novelty of enrichment through rotation or replacement of items should be a consideration; however, changing animals' environment too frequently may be stressful.

Well-conceived enrichment provides animals with choices and a degree of control over their environment, which allows them to better cope with environmental stressors (Newberry 1995). Enrichment programs should be reviewed by the IACUC, researchers, and veterinarian on a regular basis to ensure that they are beneficial to animal well-being and consistent with the goals of animal use. They should be updated as needed to ensure that they reflect current knowledge.
The Public Health Service (PHS) Policy in accordance with USGP I and VII, and other applicable Federal laws, guidelines, and policies.

PROCEDURES

1.0 Environmental enrichment and/or exercise plans will be implemented as applicable for animals in all research protocols.

2.0 Exemptions from enrichment and/or exercise for scientific reasons should be documented and justified in the protocol and specifically reviewed and approved by the IACUC.

3.0 Exemptions from enrichment or exercise for reasons related to a health condition or wellbeing can be authorized by the AV(s).
   3.1 For USDA covered species, the exemption must be reviewed by the AV(s) at least every 30 days to renew it or cancel it, unless the basis for the exemption is a permanent condition.
   A. The exemption and rationale must be documented by the AV(s) and maintained in a medical record near the animal’s housing.