



**Title:** Rabbit Husbandry

**SOP Number:** 046

**Purpose:** To establish proper rabbit room maintenance and husbandry procedures to ensure quality care and prevent the development of disease.

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## **HOUSING AND CARE**

- A. All forms located in the room's notebook must be adequately filled out.
  1. Daily observation sheet
  2. Task sheets
  3. Temperature/humidity logs
    - a. Temperature range: 61-72 degrees F
    - b. Humidity range: 30-70%
  4. Food Enrichment log
  5. Exercise Log
- B. Rooms should be checked daily for any operational deficiencies. Any deficiencies should be reported immediately to the facility manager.
- C. Water bottles are refilled daily with fresh water.
- D. Fresh food is added daily to the feeders. All food is discarded once a week and all rabbits will be given fresh food. Food receptacles are cleaned and sanitized at least once every 2 weeks.
- E. Nails will be trimmed once per month or as needed. Documentation of nail trims can be found on individual clinical records.
- F. Enrichment will be provided according to the enrichment portion of this SOP.
- G. The cage pan liners are changed at least three times a week per the rabbit holding room task sheet schedule.
- H. Rabbit banks, including pans, water bottles, feeders, and enrichment devices, are changed out and sanitized once a week (but at minimum once every two weeks). The rabbit is safely removed from its cage and placed into the exercise pen while a clean bank is being prepared.

## **CAGE SANITATION**

- A. Pan liners should be removed from the pans, placed in a trash bag and taken to the dumpster. The pans should be rinsed to remove gross debris, and then ran through the cage washer for cleaning and sanitation. When a cage washer is unavailable pans will be hosed down with hot water and sanitized by means of chemical sprayer or hydro foamer.
- B. When using a hydro foamer, rabbit cages should be cleaned with an ACS approved disinfectant. Allow the chemical to sit for the appropriate contact time (5 minutes). Following cleaning, the cages should be rinsed and allowed to air dry.
- C. Rabbit banks are sanitized at least once every 2 weeks.

## **ANIMAL ROOM SANITATION**

- A. Floors are swept daily and mopped with disinfectant mixed according to manufacturer's recommendations per the rabbit holding room task sheet schedule.
- B. Weekly- All surfaces (including door frames, lights, and vents) are wiped down with disinfectant mixed according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- C. Monthly- Floors, walls, and ceiling should be disinfected according to manufacturer's recommendations.

## **RABBIT HANDLING**

- A. Rabbits have very powerful hind legs, so great care should be taken to support them to prevent any injury to the rabbit.
- B. Removal/Return to cage
  - 1. Grasp the scruff of the neck firmly with one hand
  - 2. Support the hindquarters firmly with the other hand
- C. Transporting the rabbit
  - 1. Grasp the scruff of the neck firmly with one hand
  - 2. Place the rabbit's head under your arm/elbow being careful not to impede breathing
  - 3. Support and control the rabbit's hindquarters with the other hand

## **ENRICHMENT**

- A. Social enrichment:
  - 1. Human interaction with the rabbits during daily husbandry is encouraged.
  - 2. Animal care staff trims toenails as needed, and pet and brush the rabbits providing stimulating interaction.
  - 3. Cages will be arranged in a manner that allows the rabbits to visualize other rabbits in the room.
  - 4. Rabbits will be socially housed in pairs when studies allow for it, but only if deemed compatible by the veterinary staff.
- B. Physical enrichment:
  - 1. Hanging and tossing enrichment, nylon chews and shelves are provided to the rabbits to help satisfy their need to play and reduce boredom.
  - 2. Bunny chew blocks are provided weekly to help satisfy their need to chew.
  - 3. Alfalfa blocks and fresh produce (such as kale, lettuce, celery, etc.) may be provided to the rabbits as additional enrichment.
- C. Exercise
  - 1. Rabbits will be placed into an exercise pen to encourage normal posture changes (sitting on hind legs, stretching, running).
  - 2. Enrichment in the pen will be in the form of food, and novel objects to gnaw, toss, nudge and carry (balls, rattles, shredded paper/bags, PVC tubes, boxes etc.).
  - 3. Human interaction while in the exercise pen will be encouraged.
  - 4. Enrichment provided in the exercise pen will be different than that provided in the home cage and spread out to encourage pen investigation.
  - 5. All enrichment and exercise will be recorded in a daily enrichment/exercise log provided in the animal care binder.
- D. Implementation

1. Enrichment will be provided to the rabbits by the technicians at change-out and various times throughout the week.
2. Enrichment items will rotate to keep the items novel and the rabbits interested.
3. Time and frequency in the exercise pen will not interfere with protocol procedures but will be encouraged daily.
4. Treats will be encouraged by the technicians and research staff to allow the rabbits to get use to the personnel and handling, as well as after any procedures for positive reinforcement.
5. Exceptions to this SOP require a statement in the animal use protocol providing adequate justification as to why environmental enrichment would interfere with the study.

### **ANIMAL HEALTH MONITORING**

- A. Animals are observed daily by animal care staff for any evidence of illness or change in behavior.
  1. Everyone with access to the animal facility is responsible for immediately informing the facility manager or university veterinarian when an animal becomes ill or a change in behavior is observed.
- B. In the event of suspected illness:
  1. Record your observations in the rabbit's individual record- include the date, the problem observed, and your initials
  2. Immediately contact the ACS facility manager or the university veterinarian:

Sydnee Woodman: ACS facility manager  
806-834-2872 Office  
602-758-0670 Cell

Tiffanie Brooks: ACS/ University veterinarian  
806-834-8588 Office  
806-239-2120 Cell

Dr. Paul Stonum, ACS Clinical Veterinarian  
806-834-7373 Office  
660-562-4425 Cell