

Policy: SC-32-100
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Title: Rabbit Husbandry Care

I. Purpose:

The purpose of this policy is to outline the minimum standards of care for rabbits.

II. Policy:

All units providing animal care for rabbits must meet or exceed these minimum requirements based on the Animal Welfare Act, the Public Health Service Policy, and the ILAR *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*.

III. Procedure:

Daily:

(365 days a year without exception)

Feed each animal (based on requirements for the condition and size of animal AWA 3.54). Rabbit chow must be used within 6 months of the milling date (*Guide*, pg. 66) unless manufacturer guidelines recommend a shorter or longer expiration date. Provide sufficient potable water (AWA section 3.55). Change heavily soiled or flooded cages and/or drop pans. Observe each animal and check for health concerns. Record sick and dead animals and report to Campus Veterinary Service per Veterinary Care policy. Record Minimum and Maximum Temperatures: Refer to Safety Net #103, guidelines on the use of minimum/maximum thermometers. Keep the animal housing room clean and organized. Record completion of room tasks, initial and date on room log. Automatic watering systems (lixits) must be checked daily.

Wire hanging cages without drop pans: floors must be hosed daily to remove excreta.

Weekly:

Provide clean water bottles and sipper tubes at least every week (not to exceed 7 days) (*Guide*, pg. 70). Provide clean drop pans with clean bedding at least once per week (not to exceed 7 days).

Biweekly:

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Provide clean rabbit cages and racks at least every two weeks (not to exceed 14 days.) (*Guide, pg. 70*). Change and provide clean feeders at least every two weeks (not to exceed 14 days) (*AWA section 3.54*). Clean and change environmental enrichment at least every two weeks (not to exceed 14 days).

Quarterly:

Disinfect the animal room (includes walls, floors and ceilings).

Identification:

Rabbits must be individually identified in addition to having an appropriately labeled cage card (See Identification of Animals policy). Rabbits can be permanently identified with an ear tag, ear tattoo or micro-chip. If rabbits are microchipped, the reader must be readily available and functional.

Social Housing:

Female rabbits that will be housed longer than 6 months are required to be socially housed.

Refer to Social Housing Policy on the IACUC website

Environmental Enrichment:

Refer to the Environmental Enrichment policy. Rabbits should be provided with the ability to demonstrate species typical behaviors. Some examples of appropriate enrichment for rabbits include: Nylabones, plastic balls, wood blocks (on chains or floor cage), nesting boxes, exercise pens, and oat hay. Devices used for environmental enrichment must be easily sanitized or disposable with cage changes. Devices must be checked regularly for wear and discarded when safety hazards are present.

Facilities:

Temperature alarms must be installed in all rooms housing rabbits. Room temperature range for rabbits is 61-72 F (*Guide, pg. 44*) \Minimum of 10-15 fresh room air exchanges (*Guide, pg. 46*). AWA 3.51(b) Ventilation: Indoor housing facilities for rabbits shall be adequately ventilated to provide for the health and comfort of the animal at all times. Such facilities shall be provided with fresh air either by means of windows, doors, vents, or air conditioning and shall be ventilated so as to minimize drafts, odor, and moisture condensation. Auxiliary ventilation, such as exhaust fans and vents or air conditioning, shall be provided when ambient temperature is 85 F or higher.

"Floors should be moisture-resistant, nonabsorbent, impact-resistant, and relatively smooth..." (*Guide, pg.137*). Refer to Physical Plant and Facilities Maintenance policy.

Caging

Recommended floor space per rabbit (*Guide, pg. 59*) ***each department must provide specific cage dimensions and number of animals to be housed***. Caging must be in good condition.

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Rabbit Space Requirements:

Weight of Animal	Floor Area/Animal (ft ²)	Height (inches)
<2 kilograms	1.5	16
Up to 4 kilograms	3.0	16
Up to 5.4 kilograms	4.0	16
>5.4 kilograms	≥5.0	16

AWA 3.53(b)

Category	Individual weights (pounds)	Minimum space per rabbit (ft ²)
Groups	3-5	1.0
	6-8	2.0
	9 or more	3.0
Individual adults	3-5	1.25
	6-8	2.5
	9-11	3.75
	12 or more	5.0
Nursing females	3-5	4.0
	6-8	5.0
	9-11	6.0
	12 or more	7.5