

BOOK REVIEWS

Performance Standards and Animal Welfare: Definition, Application and Assessment, Parts I & II

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This publication is based on two conferences organised by the Scientists Center for Animal Welfare (SCAW), held in the USA in 1997 and 1998. The mission of SCAW is to promote humane care, use and management of animals involved in research, testing and education.

Part I focuses on the translation of theoretical performance standards into practical guidelines for the care and use of research animals, based on real data, measurements and defined outcomes. It is hoped that Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees (IACUCs) could incorporate these performance standards to achieve the goals of the Animal Welfare Act. The chapter 'Enrichment of the environment' starts by describing a study involving non-human primates which shows that enrichment devices do not cure behavioural pathology. Unfortunately, nothing is mentioned on the prevention of abnormal behaviour and no reference for this study is given. In a more general section on enrichment plans for research animals, knowledge of species-typical behaviour, physiology and anatomy is considered to be important. For dogs, exercise does not seem to be a way of achieving well-being; social interaction with conspecifics and humans is more likely to achieve this goal.

Attention is paid to some guidelines of the USDA (US Department of Agriculture), PHS (Public Health Service) and AAALAC (Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care). Performance standards for facilities and equipment are described, such as autoclaves, tunnel washers, water quality and ventilation. US ventilation standards require 10–15 air changes per hour (ACH), whereas European standards require 15–20 ACH, representing a significant increase in costs. The first part ends by addressing the question of how to perform a risk–benefit analysis.

Part II is a report resulting from a conference held in 1998. This conference was based on the results of a survey of the participants, who were questioned about difficulties with programs in their institutions. Besides a rather basic section on animal welfare, mentioning the importance of socialisation of animals with conspecifics and humans, environmental enrichment, and role of personnel, this part focuses on occupational health and safety programs, risk assessment, allergies, biohazard research, zoonoses and medical surveillance.

As an example of the monitoring of performance standards at multiple sites, the situation at an American home products company is described, with details on the responsibilities of an animal welfare council, a guide for IACUC members and quality assurance. Another section deals with surgery and postoperative care. Two case reports evaluate cage changing intervals and cage stocking densities, but no references are included. The last chapter deals with colony management and behaviour research. The cornerstone of the program is the monthly wellness assessment, developed for chimpanzees, which includes assessment of general health, presence of species-typical behaviour and the ability to cope and interact with a social group.

Although this publication does not reveal new views for insiders in the field of animal welfare, it may be useful to newcomers and members of animal ethics committees.

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