

Responses to allegations made in PETA complaint to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Institutes of Health.

Prepared Oct. 29, 2007

Note: The following allegations were made by a former animal care technician in the University of Colorado Denver laboratory. He made many of these allegations while still an employee, and records show that all formal complaints were formally investigated.

The technician is no longer an employee, but was not fired for bringing up these allegations. The university encourages staff members to raise concerns, and there are transparent systems to investigate those concerns. The former employee also has met several times with top university officials, including the chancellor and a member of the University of Colorado Board of Regents.

Allegation: Golda, a macaque monkey, received no care for hours after vets were notified that she had a prolapsed colon.

Response: Not true. A laboratory technician reported the incident and an investigation ensued. It was learned that two veterinary technicians immediately anesthetized the animal and moistened the prolapsed colon with saline. There was a delay in response from the on-call veterinarian, who was in a meeting on another campus several miles away. Upon arrival, the veterinarian attempted further treatment to moisten the prolapsed colon. When that did not work, the veterinarian decided to euthanize the animal. This incident occurred in 2005; primates no longer are used in research at the University of Colorado Denver.

Allegation: Former employee said he never got a response to complaint about Golda the monkey.

Response: The matter was investigated as a result of concerns raised by the former employee. The complaint was not formally filed, so no formal or written response was prepared.

Allegation: A cat with a swollen eye, March 14, 2007, was untreated for a month after the technician first reported the problem.

Response: Not true. Records show there were no cats in the laboratory on that date.

Allegation: The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) failed to review an allegation that cats were not fully anesthetized for surgery and that the drug used is obsolete.

Response: Not true. The IACUC did investigate the protocol and the drug is commonly used for this type of experiment.

The research may lead to treatments to relieve human back pain. The experiment first was reviewed by a panel of scientists at the National Institutes of Health, which determined that the research was important, that the use of animals was appropriate, and that the methods were humane. The IACUC then reviewed the experiment protocols to ensure ethical and humane standards were met. A second IACUC investigation ensued after the former employee filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The drug used to anesthetize cats, alphachloralose, is the best choice for this kind of experiment. It disconnects the pain sensors in the animal's brain but allows the nerves and muscles to function. Animals move, but cannot feel pain. The former employee cites "The IACUC Handbook" (2000, Jerald Silverman, Mark A Suckow, and Sreekant Murthy eds.) in alleging that the drug is outdated. To the contrary, the article clearly states that this drug is appropriate and commonly used for this type of experiment.

Allegation: Worker doing a terminal bleed on Julius the rabbit, Dec. 19, 2006, wasn't sure of the procedure. The rabbit didn't appear to be adequately anesthetized because it pulled its paw away when the paw was repeatedly pinched with forceps.

Response: Records indicate that Julius was anesthetized with ketamine and xylazine by two certified veterinary technicians who have had several years of training. After anesthesia, 80 cc of blood was withdrawn. The rabbit was then euthanized.

Allegation: A series of incidents in 2006 when rats didn't have daily water or food.

Response: According to policy, such instances are to be remedied by technicians, such as the former employee, and/or a report form filled out. Without exact dates, it is not known whether the employee performed his duties during these instances.

Allegation: Frequent problem with overcrowded mice, rat cages.

Response: There are a large number of breeding colonies in the lab. As the pups reach weaning age, a cage can go, overnight, from being OK to being overcrowded. When this occurs, the care staff informs the researcher. If the researcher's team does not alleviate the crowding within two working days, the care staff members rectify the situation.

Allegation: Feb 5., 2007, memo from facility manager Michelle Wallace saying that seven rats died because the cage wasn't pushed all the way into rack in the housing room, which means the ventilation wasn't fully engaged

Response: Unfortunately, this did happen. Upon investigation, we could not tell who was responsible. The facility manager sent out the e-mail reminding care staff of the critical need to ensure that the cages are properly in place.

Allegation: Retro orbital bleeding was conducted on two mice Jan. 25, 2007, even though such procedures as vein bleeding are increasingly used in part out of concern for the animal's welfare

Response: The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, which includes several veterinarians, has determined this procedure is humane if the animal is anesthetized.

Allegation: Former employee says large sections of the tails of mice and rats were regularly amputated to obtain blood even though tail vein sampling and vein blood collection are more commonly used.

Response: Small sections of tail are often taken for genetic analysis. This is sometimes done in conjunction with tail bleeds. This is a procedure approved by the IACUC, which includes several veterinarians.

Allegation: On Dec. 17, 2006, cage cards were missing on cage with two dead mice, indicating the animals hadn't been attended or technician didn't bother to remove the carcasses.

Response: According to our policy, all such incidents must be reported. No incident report has been found. Absence of a cage card could mean the animals were appropriately euthanized.

Allegation: Filthy animal cages at Center for Comparative Medicine on at least five different days.

Response: According to policy, such instances are to be remedied by technicians, such as the former employee, and/or a report form filled out. No reports have been found.

Allegation: Oct. 29, 2006, animals were found without food in three cages that also contained dead animals

Response: According to our policy, all such incidents must be reported. No incident report has been found.

Allegation: Nov. 12, 2006, 15 mice found in a cage with no water. There were five dead animals in the cage.

Response: According to our policy, all such incidents must be reported. No incident report has been found.

Allegation: Jan. 9, 2007, flooded cages found in three animal housing rooms. Some cages contained drowned animals. Former employee said lids on water bottles were often loose and ball stoppers often malfunctioned, causing frequent flooding.

Response: According to our policy, all such incidents must be reported. No incident form has been found. Unfortunately, we have had incidents such as this in the past. They

are reported to the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, with appropriate corrective action taken.

Allegation: Dec 31, 2006, syringes that should have been disposed of appropriately were found in a trash container

Response: Special containers for safe disposal of used sharp instruments are placed in all procedure rooms. No record of this specific incident exists.