

1. PURPOSE

The intent of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to describe an appropriate environmental enrichment program for rabbits.

2. RESPONSIBILITY

Facility Animal Care Committees (FACC), veterinarian, principal investigators (PIs), animal care staff

3. PROCEDURES

- 3.1. The purpose of environmental enrichment is to provide rabbits with opportunities to express basic behavior needs, to promote species-typical, non-injurious, behavior and to promote physical and mental health thus enhancing animal welfare. The environmental enrichment should be biologically relevant (i.e.: hiding, socializing, searching) so that it does not lose its enriching value over time.
- 3.2. Social Contact:
 - 3.2.1. Whenever possible, pair- or group-house rabbits of the same gender.
 - 3.2.2. Consult with the facility veterinarian before group-housing males.
 - 3.2.3. Exceptions for pair or group-housing must include strong scientific, welfare or medical justification:
 - 3.2.3.1. Incompatibility (aggression)
 - 3.2.3.2. Medical reasons
 - 3.2.3.3. Specific protocol approved by FACC
- 3.3. Housing System:
 - 3.3.1. Animals should be housed with the goal of maximizing species-specific behaviors, minimizing stress-induced behaviors, providing opportunity for social contact and locomotor and exploratory behaviors.
 - 3.3.2. House rabbits preferably in solid-bottom pens with contact bedding; when rabbits are housed in cages, provide regular opportunity for exercise (e.g., play pens), unless specifically described in the animal use protocol and approved by the FACC.
 - 3.3.3. Housing system should exceed the most recent minimal space recommendations established by the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC).
- 3.4. Dietary Enrichment:
 - 3.4.1. Provide (autoclaved) hay preferably daily, or at least twice a week.
 - 3.4.2. Provide small quantities of fresh vegetables and fruits regularly (2-3 times/week). Vegetables should be thoroughly rinsed prior to use.
- 3.5. Objects:
 - 3.5.1. Shelter:
 - 3.5.1.1. Provide shelters or nesting box (e.g., plastic drums or buckets, halved, or shoe boxes, litters).
 - 3.5.2. Toys:
 - 3.5.2.1. Plastic balls, dumbbells or plastic water bottles may also be provided.
- 3.6. Exemption:
 - 3.6.1. Exemption from this environmental enrichment program must be justified and approved by the FACC, or prescribed for medical reasons.

SOP REVISION HISTORY

| DATE | NEW VERSION |
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| 2023.03.06 | 2. Responsibility Facility Animal Care Committees (FACC), veterinarian , principal investigators (PIs), animal care staff. |
| 2023.03.06 | 3.2.3. Exceptions for pair or group-housing must include strong scientific, welfare or medical justification : 3.2.3.1. Incompatibility (aggression) |
| 2023.03.06 | 3.3.1. Animals should be housed with the goal of maximizing species-specific behaviors, minimizing stress-induced behaviors, providing opportunity for social contact and locomotor and exploratory behaviors . |
| 2023.03.06 | 3.3.3. Housing system should exceed the most recent minimal space recommendations established by the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC). |