

**1. PURPOSE**

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

**2. RESPONSIBILITY**

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

**3. PROCEDURES**

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- 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 include:
    - 3.2.3.1. Incompatibility.
    - 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 and minimizing stress-induced 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 a protocol and approved by the FACC.
  - 3.3.3. Housing system should exceed the minimal space recommendations established by 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.