Policy on permission to use animals in areas outside of the animal facility

Animal facilities are controlled environments specifically designed for housing and using animals. Their design allows for optimal lighting, temperature and air quality and facilities sanitation. Procedures on animals are to be conducted within animal facilities. Work with animals outside the animal facility is an exception that requires prior approval by the Facility Animal Care Committee (FACC). This policy outlines the regulations concerning the work with animals in areas outside of the animal facility. Applies to wild animals in captivity.

1. Description and rationale for the policy

The use of animals in areas outside of the animal facility requires adequate justification. This policy provides a framework for FACCs in the approval of work with animals outside of the animal facility, taking into account the specific constraints of the facility (space, equipment, etc.) while ensuring that institutional and CCAC policies and guidelines are applied. This policy addresses the following:

1.1 Protecting the health status of the animals. The animal facility must be kept pathogen-free, and to this end, limiting movement of animals is needed, particularly when returning to the animal facility.

1.2 Reducing the stress of transportation and relocation. Moving animals through corridors and elevators, and sitting for a certain amount of time in an unknown environment, with different noise, smell, temperature, etc., is stressful for them. Anxiety and stress should be minimized at all times.

1.3 Containing allergens. Prevention of allergies is a health and safety issue. Rodents are highly allergenic. By conducting procedures outside the facility, more people have the potential to be exposed to allergens, some of whom might not suspect they are at risk of exposure (administrative and custodial staff, visitors, etc.). The ventilation system in the animal facility is designed to be non-re-circulating. This might not be the case in the laboratories, meaning that other people might be exposed through the ventilation system.

1.4 Monitoring of procedures. When procedures are conducted in the animal facility, the technical staff is available to assist users and can help ensure that procedures are done properly. When procedures are conducted outside the facility, the FACC has to make sure that they are done correctly and this makes monitoring more difficult.

1.5 Restricting access to unauthorized individuals. Animal facilities are secured to limit the access to people trained and approved to work with animals. When procedures are conducted outside the facility, the area needs to have an adequate level of security.

2. Procedure to apply for an exemption to be allowed to take animals outside of the animal facility

The following points need to be followed in order to be allowed to perform procedures on animals outside the facility:

2.1 The Principal Investigator must provide a written request to the FACC. This request must be within the Animal Use Protocol (AUP) either at the initial application, in an annual renewal or by amendment during the period of AUP validity. The request must include:

2.1.1 A detailed justification for the permission to work with animals outside of the facility.
2.1.2 Specific details on how the five concerns raised above under point #1 (see criteria for exemption, below) will be addressed;
2.1.3 The specific location for the animal use;
2.1.4 The total amount of time that an animal is expected to remain outside of the facility. The request must be approved by the FACC before the work can start.

2.2 The FACC or an FACC subcommittee shall perform annual inspections of the areas outside the animal facility to assess and ensure compliance. Veterinary and Quality Assistance Advisors may also visit these areas and monitor the procedures conducted at any time thereafter.

2.3 The use of animals outside the facility must comply with CCAC and McGill policies and guidelines. Researchers, the FACC via its annual inspections and protocol review, the animal facility staff mandated to perform rounds and the Quality Assistant Advisor are to ensure that the room and procedures are as approved in the Animal Use Protocol and that all applicable policies and guidelines are followed.

2.4 The exemption is valid only for the approved procedure(s), location and species.

2.5 On approval of the request within the Animal Use Protocol, an A.L.P.H.A. (Alternate Laboratory for Procedures and Housing of Animals) certificate will be issued by the FACC. The certificate must be posted within the housing/holding/procedure area. Those are characterized based on the duration of the presence of animals: housing is any length of time higher than 12 hours, holding or procedure area need to be for less than 12 hours. An ALPHA Certificate can be revoked by the FACC at any time. For details, see http://www.mcgill.ca/research/researchers/compliance/animal/alpaha.

3. Criteria for exemptions

FACCs will use the following criteria to evaluate applications for the right to work with animals outside of the animal facility:

3.1 There needs to be clear and convincing reason(s) that make successful completion of the work in the animal facility impossible. This may include the use of specialized equipment that cannot be housed in the animal facility as well as other species-, experimental- and facility-specific constraints that preclude work in the animal facility.

4. Requirements for exemptions

- The application must demonstrate that the work cannot be completed in the animal facility and how all five concerns raised by the work with animals outside of the animal facility (detailed in Section #1, above) will be addressed:

4.1 Protecting the health status of the animals: For example, obtaining veterinary approval prior to taking animals in or out of the facility to prevent cross-contamination and introduction of pathogens in the facility; the use of cover lids at all times and linen to cover cages while in transport to the laboratory; ensuring the area is clean, free of clutter, and surfaces sanitizable (non-porous); disposing of animal and caging waste according to local requirements. Do not stack cages containing animals.

4.2 Reducing the stress of transportation and relocation: The SOP 501 “Animal transport and use outside of animal facilities” must be followed. For example, using species-specific mechanisms of transport, demonstrating that the transport will use shortest distance possible with reduced exposure to public spaces and ensuring that animals will spend a minimum period of time in labs or corridors; using appropriate transport caging style and size, at the usual housing density for the animal facility; minimizing the chances of animal escape during transport and while in the laboratory by securing cages and cage lids; not obstructing the ventilation by stacking cages on top of each other.

4.3 Containing allergens: For example: minimizing contact of non-animal users with dead or live animals. by using a dedicated lab area/room (where possible); cleaning/disinfecting thoroughly countertops and equipment after use; returning cages promptly to the animal facility for processing and bagging and transporting dead animals to the appropriate place for disposal promptly.
4.4 **Monitoring of procedures**: For example: supervising less experienced users to ensure that handling and procedures are done properly; requesting the assistance of Animal Health, Veterinary or Quality Assistance staff.

4.5 **Restricting access to unauthorized individuals.** For example: closing room doors and interior window shades in the laboratory to avoid inadvertent entrance or observation by non-authorised personnel.

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