

IAT Animal Welfare Group (AWG)

Advice Notice:

THE PROVISION OF WATER AND FOOD FOR LABORATORY ANIMALS

*Advancing and promoting excellence in the
care and welfare of animals in science*



Non-Compliance

'Non-compliance' refers to a failure to comply with a condition of a licence granted under Animals Scientific Procedures Act (ASPA) or a provision of the Act itself. One such condition is Standard Condition 4 on a section 2C licence - Establishment Licence. This condition states (1) all protected animals must at all times be provided with adequate care and accommodation appropriate to their type or species. (3) Unless otherwise authorised by the Secretary of State an environment, housing, freedom of movement, **food and water** appropriate for the health and wellbeing of each protected animal shall be provided.

As reported by the Animals in Science Regulation Unit (ASRU) **a failure to provide water and food is the second most common cause of non-compliance in 2016**. This document aims to provide advice with a focus on the role of the animal technicians on the steps to be taken to ensure compliance with the terms of ASPA standard condition 4.

Root causes

The primary reason for the failure to provide water and food are related to the effectiveness of routine checks of the animals to identify both lack of provision and the declining condition of the animals. The ability of an establishment to conduct full and proper checks, as required by ASPA, has been reported to be related to both staffing resource and the ease with which staff can readily view and assess the animals and their environment. (*Home Office Animals in Science Regulation Unit Annual Report 2016*).

Establishment of new cages

A major risk factor of animals not being provided water and/or food is during the establishment of new cages. Example events include:

- a consignment of a new cohort of animals delivered to the establishment
- the weaning of animals
- transferring animals for the purpose of breeding
- post-surgery animals into recovery cages
- the holding of animals in designated rooms outside of the main animal facility
- separating animals e.g. fighting / into experimental groups

Standard operation procedures (SOPs)

The above tasks should include how these duties are undertaken including the provision of water and food, see example in Appendix 1. Adequate training should be provided for all technicians, including in the use of SOPs. CPD / review of practices should be considered, even for what seem like straightforward tasks. Animal technicians should ensure that they have time to perform their allocated tasks, to ensure that daily checks can be carried out as well as any additional tasks required of them. Issues should be discussed with NACWOs. Technicians should be prepared to be reallocated to assist colleagues if required. NACWO should escalate staffing issues to PELH if required.

The table below is taken from *'Introduction to Laboratory Animal Science, Technology and Welfare'* Third Edition revised by Stephen W Barnett.

It shows the average amounts of dry diet and water that might be expected to be consumed by an adult male per day. Many factors influence the amount an animal eats and drinks and some animals will 'play' with the water and food, which can lead to them running out so they must be checked and topped up regularly.

Species	Diet	Water
Mouse	5g	6cm ³
Rat	15g	35cm ³
Syrian Hamster	10g	8cm ³
Guinea pig (800g)	40g	100cm ³
Rabbit (3kg)	150g	500cm ³
Ferret	65g	45cm ³
Cat (3kg)	200g	500cm ³
Dog (12kg)	400g	1500cm ³

Where Project licences authorise alteration in normal food and water provision

When alteration in provision of food or water is permitted in the project licence, good communications between technicians and scientists are required. Technicians should ensure that they understand what feeding / watering regime is to be used. There should be specific allocated responsibilities to scientists and to technicians. When feeding or watering is allocated to the scientist, the technician can act collaboratively to ensure that there are no errors or omissions.

Recommendations

Below are some suggested recommendations to be taken to avoid animals not being given water and food thus reducing the incidence of Home Office non-compliance. This list is not exhaustive and shows some common examples only. How your facility chooses to check adequate water and food provision it is up to you, However, it is important to ensure it is repeatable and robust enough to ensure water and food are available to all the animals in your care at all times.

- A designated person checks rooms in the morning at the start of the day and the end of the working day to check the water and food levels. Ideally this should not be the person that has been working in the room.
- A physical touch check of bottles could be implemented.
- Spot check ordits by seniors.
- Consider using different people for AM and PM checks where possible.
- A bottle that has remained at the same level over a 24hr period should be checked to ensure it is not blocked.
- When water is less than a sufficient volume it should always be topped up or replenished.
- If you have automatic watering systems, ensure they are checked regularly for any air pockets or blocked pipes, and record this check. At least, once per day is required, or at a sufficient frequency to ensure animal welfare is not compromised by the blockage.
- Highlight any newly set up cages with coloured cards to ensure they get an extra check, see example in Appendix 2.

- Use the staff induction process to highlight the importance of providing water and food, reminding all staff, including researchers, that they are all water and food providers in animal facilities and designated rooms.
- Areas such as isolators where cages are more difficult to visualise should be regarded as high risk.

Concluding remarks

An important aspect of an establishment's culture of care is the ability to provide food and water and it is the responsibility of all those who work with animals. Good communication to all users of the establishment regarding the responsibility that we all have to the animals within our care, coupled with a constant review of the processes, is vital in ensuring animals have a constant supply of water and food at all times. Unless licence authority exists for this not to happen, in these cases the cage must be clearly labelled.

Appendix 1

Example of a simple SOP for routine daily checks.

Husbandry

After completing the welfare assessment for each cage, ensure that the following conditions are met.

Be aware of when the next check / change / welfare assessment will occur so that sufficient volume of diet available for the number of animals in the cage to last until the next welfare assessment.

Sufficient volume of water has been consumed and is available for the number of animals in the cage until the next empty/refill or whole bottle change.

- A suitable amount of nesting material is present.
- A fun tunnel is provided and is in good condition.
- Sign the day book to indicate the completion of the above tasks.

Technician checks

- 1.1. Check all cages have adequate water and food.
- 1.2. Check all cages are entire and connected properly to the airflow of the AHU. If present, use red tab indicators as a visual aid.
- 1.3. Commence second daily check on all welfare concerns as required. If necessary contact the area manager or NACWO.
- 1.4. Fill any gaps in the IVC racks with new cages depending on the needs of the facility.
- 1.5. Leave the change station in a clean state and attach the hatch – start UV cycle if the function is available.
- 1.6. Hoover floor and then mop with appropriate detergent/disinfectant.
- 1.7. Sign the day book to indicate which tasks have been performed.

Appendix 2

**Post
Wean
Check**

**New
Delivery**

**Post
Surgery
Animals**