

Mechanisms for Responding to Allegations of Animal Welfare Concerns or Improper Treatment of Animals

The NIH ARAC Guidelines outline the available mechanisms for reporting animal welfare concerns and describe the kinds of findings which must be communicated to the NIH Office for Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW), which typically is reported through the Office of Animal Care and Use (OACU). This NCI Guideline outlines the expected sequence of events that will follow when an animal welfare incident is observed and/or reported to the NCI Animal Program. The NCI upholds high ethical and scientific standards for animal use and the principal that research animals should be treated with humane care and respect.

1. Any person may report concerns about the care and use of research animals to NCI Animal Care and Use Committee by contacting a committee member, either of the Committee Chairpersons, or the ACUC Coordinator. Facility Veterinarians may also field concerns about animal welfare and questions about approved animal study proposals. Concerns may include violations of the Animal Welfare regulations, PHS Policy, or the NIH PHS Assurance. A member of the veterinary staff will respond to all animal welfare concerns, including weekends, evenings, and holidays to ensure appropriate care of animals.
2. All concerns will be investigated and reported to the ACUC subcommittee (ACUC chair, Animal Program Director, and ACUC Coordinator) and the Director of OACU who provides guidance to the ACUC subcommittee. The subcommittee may request verification or a more thorough investigation of the details. Any findings of concern or significance with recommended actions will be communicated to the ACUC at the next scheduled meeting (semi-annual or ACUC monthly meetings). The ACUC then determines the course of action, which may include a range of actions up to suspension of the activity.
3. For non-reportable events where the ACUC has concerns, a meeting with the responsible individuals may occur and written documentation (i.e. related e-mails or minutes) will be kept by the ACUC Administrative office.
4. For OLAW reportable events, findings and recommended actions are summarized in a letter that is reviewed by the ACUC members and signed by the ACUC chair. The letter is then sent to the appropriate individuals, which typically includes the principal investigator, involved animal users, and the Director of CCR (when applicable).
5. OLAW reportable events will be sent through the OACU to the Institute Official for final reporting to OLAW.