Edwards

12 October 2021

Re: Summary of exceptions attachment

The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee at Edwards Lifesciences has approved the following exception to the Animal Welfare Act regulations.

- Alternative cage dimensions for rabbits.

The Edwards Research Center (ERC) houses rabbits in pairs whenever possible, in accordance with the USDA, the Guide, and AAALAC's recommendations to socially house rabbits.

Per the AWA, rabbits weighing 2-4 kg should have floor space of 3.0 ft^2 and therefore two rabbits in this weight range should have 6.0 ft^2. Our rabbit cage sizes have 5.2 ft^2 or 5.5 ft^2 floor space (depending on manufacturer). 16% of our cages have a shelf with usable space above and below (12 shelves which are 26.5 in. X 12 in. (2.2 ft^2) in the 5.2 ft^2 cages and 3 shelves which are 26.5 in. X 8.5 in. (1.6 ft^2) in the 5.5 ft^2 cages).

To prioritize pair housing, the IACUC has approved the housing of two rabbits up to 4 kg in these cages.

The 0.5-0.8 ft^2 reduction in floor space per pair is outweighed by the benefits of social housing. Despite the reduced floor space, the rabbits maintain good health and engage in species specific behaviors. Importantly, they have positive social interactions with their cage mates, which provide sensory and cognitive stimulation, in turn promoting their psychological welfare.

This exception applies to all rabbits housed at the ERC.

Edwards Lifesciences LLC
One Edwards Way · Irvine, CA USA · 92614
Phone: 949.250.2500 · Fax: 949.250.2525 · www.edwards.com

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