

Surplus laboratory animals, reuse and rehoming

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1 Introduction

1.1 Surplus laboratory animals

The term ‘surplus laboratory animals’ refers to animals who have been used in experiments or for breeding and are unsuitable or no longer suitable for their originally intended purpose. They may have been used for research or education, and killing it was not necessary afterwards. They may also have been used for breeding, for example, parent animals who need to be replaced after some time, or offspring who are unusable due to their sex or genetic background or who are superfluous for other reasons. They may also have been ordered but ultimately not used.

1.2 Breeding policy

Utrecht University and the UMC Utrecht are striving to minimise the number of animals who must be killed without having been put to a meaningful use for research and/or education. This effort starts with a conscientious breeding policy (see policy document on Breeding laboratory animals) aimed at keeping breeding surpluses as small as possible. This is in line with the government’s intention to curb the numbers of laboratory animals that are bred but not used. In addition, previous breeding results must be considered when choosing parent animals. This reduces the chances of animals being born with a trait that makes them unsuitable for use in experiments or for rehoming.

1.3 Re-use

Utrecht University and the UMC Utrecht encourage the use of surplus laboratory animals for research, education and training. Re-use is defined as using animals for an experiment after they have already been used in another experiment or if they are offspring of breeding with a likely harmful phenotype. The Experiments on Animals Act (*Wet op de dierproeven* or 'Wod') permits laboratory animals to be reused for research or education if:

- the severity of the discomfort in the previous experiment was 'mild' or 'moderate'; *and*
- the animal's general state of health and well-being has been fully restored since the previous experiment; *and*
- the expected severity of the discomfort for the following experiment is classified as 'mild', 'moderate' or 'non-recovery'; *and*
- the new procedures are in accordance with veterinary recommendations.

1.4 Rehoming or euthanasia

If a laboratory animal is no longer suitable for use in experiments and/or education, it will be either rehomed or euthanised. Farm animals may be slaughtered if there are no legal or regulatory restrictions to doing so. A laboratory animal may be considered no longer usable due to illness, age, behaviour, or another quality, or because there is no interest from researchers in using that type of animal. We strive to rehome laboratory animals who are no longer suitable for use in experiments or are otherwise superfluous. If the animal is not suitable for rehoming because of some disorder, a genetic modification, the presence of an infectious agent or deviant behaviour, or if a new owner cannot be found for it, then it will be euthanised, or slaughtered in the case of farm animals. Depending on the situation within the facility, these decisions will be made in any case by the laboratory animal coordinator, the animal's daily caregiver, the Animal Welfare Body (AWB/lvD) Utrecht and the principal investigator or other relevant officer(s) within the chain.

2 Aim

The aim of this policy is:

- to encourage the use of surplus laboratory animals for research and/or education and to enable the rehoming of surplus laboratory animals;
- to create clarity about what action to be taken if surplus laboratory animals are found not eligible for use or re-use in research and/or education.

3 Scope

The internal requirements below for aligning supply and demand of surplus laboratory animals are binding. Animals are not to be used in experiments or rehomed before they are weaning age. The only possible exception to this is if unweaned animals are necessary to answer a scientific question, and if all other legal requirements have been met otherwise.

4 Procedure

4.1 Making animals available

The project's work protocol states whether the animals are to be made available as surplus animals and if they could be eligible for rehoming once the experiment is finished. If this is the case, agreements will be made during the alignment of the work protocol between the AWB/IvD Utrecht, the Study Director (SD) or Principal Investigator (PI) and the contact person at the laboratory animal facility involved about any conditions (such as temporary housing, costs, responsibilities, any necessary interventions) that may apply to making them available and transferring them (see sections 1 and 2 below). In all cases, the researcher or owner should state at what point the animals will be available well before the ending date of the experiment.

A researcher or owner of a breeding establishment who owns or anticipates having surplus laboratory animals, and is intending to dispose of them should register them as surplus laboratory animals with the AWB (info@ivd-utrecht.nl).

After coordinating with the designated veterinarian, and other experts if necessary, the AWB will evaluate if these animals are suitable for use/re-use in research and/or education or for rehoming.

4.1.1 Making the animal available to other researchers

4.1.1.1 Notification of availability by researcher/breeding coordinator

Use or re-use of a laboratory animal is preferable to rehoming, since the former option can prevent new animals being bred or purchased. Even rehoming for use in a terminal experiment is preferable to rehoming as a pet, since it may prevent the breeding/purchase of a new laboratory animal whose fate is ultimately to be killed. This may contribute to the R of 'reduction'.

A researcher or owner of a breeding establishment should notify the AWB/IvD Utrecht of surplus laboratory animals by e-mail (info@ivd-utrecht.nl), and will be asked to provide information about the animals such as species, sex, age, number, genetic background, any procedures they may have undergone, and date available. After consulting the designated veterinarian or if necessary other experts, the AWB/IvD Utrecht will evaluate whether these animals are suitable for use or re-use in research and/or education or for rehoming.

4.1.1.2 Notification of available animals by AWB/IvD Utrecht

The AWB/IvD Utrecht will inform the laboratory animal coordinators at the earliest possible phase about available surplus animals, supplying all relevant details about them as well as the period when researchers can make their interest known. The laboratory animal coordinators will pass on this information to the researchers within their own departments.

4.1.1.3 Communicating interest

Any researcher or instructor interested in surplus laboratory animals, either in principle or in specific animals available, should communicate their interest with a description of the intended purpose and any other relevant arguments to the AWB/IvD Utrecht (info@ivd-utrecht.nl), who will evaluate the request.

4.1.1.4 Transfer

Partly on the basis of the information provided, the AWB/IvD Utrecht will decide whether the animals can be made available to the researcher for the purpose described. If more than one researcher is interested, then the AWB will evaluate the requests and will decide which researcher to allocate the animals to on the basis of relevant arguments (aim of re-use, expected discomfort level, etc.). The AWB will then notify the animal facility that the animals can be released to the new owner for research or education. The facility, along with the Study Director or Principal Investigator, will ensure that the transfer of the surplus animals is noted in its records. Any payment for the animals must be arranged in full consultation between the old and new owners.

4.1.1.5 Keeping surplus laboratory animals

The point at which an animal becomes available as surplus will be coordinated as closely as possible with the time it is transferred. In exceptional cases, surplus laboratory animals determined to be suitable for use/re-use will be kept in stock for at most two weeks. The AWB will ensure that the stocks of surplus laboratory animals offered remain limited and in reasonable proportion to anticipated demand. The researcher who assumes responsibility for taking the animals will bear the costs of keeping them. If the un hoped-for situation arises that animals are kept for several days but no one is found to take them, then the costs of keeping them will be borne by the licensee.

4.1.2 Rehoming a laboratory animal

4.1.2.1 Notification of availability by researcher/breeding coordinator

If the animals cannot be used or re-used in experiments but may be suitable for rehoming, then the researcher or owner of a breeding establishment should notify the AWB/IvD Utrecht (info@ivd-utrecht.nl) about the surplus animals, supplying the following information about them: species, sex, age, number, any previous procedures, and date available, as well as any abnormalities. The AWB will decide whether the animals are suitable for rehoming, both during the alignment phase of the experiment and at the point when the animals become available. If necessary, the designated veterinarian or other experts will be consulted.

4.1.2.2 Notification of available animals by AWB/IvD

The AWB/IvD Utrecht and, if appropriate, the researchers involved and employees of the animal facility, will inform employees within the UU and/or UMC Utrecht about the opportunity to adopt the animals. How broadly this information is distributed will depend on the species, number of animals, etc. The information can be distributed directly by word of mouth as well as through such channels as departmental newsletters, targeted e-mails or a faculty newsletter. This communication provides all relevant details of the animals and should state the deadline for anyone to report their interest in them.

If it is not possible to rehome the animal with employees or students, the animal may be offered to the SHHH (*Stichting hulp en herplaatsing huisdieren*), a foundation which helps find homes for pets, for a fee. Depending on the species and number, other organizations such as care farms may be

considered. In all cases, the animal must be accompanied by a medical dossier, including any treatment plan/recommendations.

4.1.2.3 Stating interest

Anyone interested in adopting an animal should sign up with the AWB/IvD Utrecht. The researchers or employees of animal facilities do not assign or reserve animals for applicants.

The AWB will assign the animals to new owners and ensure a proper transfer. Agreements about the transfer will be made between the AWB, the researcher, the MT of the animal facility / chairperson of the relevant department.

Conditions may be set for rehoming animals, such as requiring the animal to remain available as a blood donor.

4.1.2.4 A sick laboratory animal with a disorder

If a laboratory animal is sick or has a disorder, its suitability for rehoming as a pet must be evaluated. The following aspects must be taken into account in the evaluation:

- the animal's age;
- its general state of health;
- its behaviour;
- if applicable, the impact of operations or other procedures (such as duration and degree of discomfort, any lasting harm) that were/are needed prior to the rehoming and
- its anticipated quality of life.

The animal need not be optimally healthy, but must be in good health. The new owner must be able to handle a disorder or the potential for one. An animal with a medical condition can still be highly suitable for rehoming, if a realistic and reasonable treatment is available with a good long-term prognosis. The animal's expected quality of life must be the primary concern.

Advice should be sought from the designated veterinarian or other experts. These experts are completely objective and will put their findings, considerations and conclusions in a case report (see annex 1) with a summary in non-technical Dutch, after which a careful consideration will be made. This consideration will be entered in the animal's dossier kept in its department (thus it is available to everyone).

4.1.2.5 Transfer

In the event of rehoming, an employee of the AWB/IvD Utrecht or the chairperson of the department involved and the new owner must fill out and sign the 'Herplaatsingsovereenkomst' form (see annex 2) (art. 13f, 3a Wod), which includes a health certificate. Sometimes an animal will be released to a new owner for a trial period to make sure that it is compatible with the situation at home and new owner. Once the form has been signed, the new owner assumes complete responsibility for the adopted animal. This animal will be entered in the 'andere bestemming' (other purpose) column in the annual register of laboratory animals.

4.1.3 Euthanasia of a laboratory animal

The AWB/IvD Utrecht will order the humane killing of the surplus laboratory animals or, if they are farm animals, their transport to a slaughterhouse, if:

- the animals are found unsuitable for re-use;
- no one has stated an interest in the animals during a period of at most two weeks;
- it is already clear that there is not and never will be interest in the animals;
- re-homing is not an option.

Depending on the species and number of animals, interested researchers may be contacted in advance about the proposed euthanasia and the characteristics of the animal involved (including its health status and previous interventions or procedures). This promotes optimal use of the animal's tissues and organs. See also the document 'Policy on collecting live material from animals'.

If a euthanised laboratory animal was sick, an autopsy is usually performed to find the cause of its sickness. There is no autopsy after a healthy animal has been euthanised (due to e.g. behaviour). If the euthanasia involves a species that can be used in veterinary training, then the cadaver can be made available for this purpose, following the guidelines in the Animal Donor Codicil.

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