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This publication is no longer current and is not being updated.

Code of Practice for the Housing and Care of Animals Bred, Supplied or Used for Scientific Purposes

Short Guide to Using the Code of Practice

Archived

Animals in Science Regulation Unit, November 2014

a Legal background

The Code of Practice (“CoP”) is issued under section 21 of ASPA. It meets the standards of Annex III of the Directive 2010/63/EU, while retaining higher UK CoP standards in force prior to 2010. The retention of these standards was debated and agreed in parliament.

Section 3 of the CoP provides additional advice derived from Commission Recommendation 2007/526/EC (itself based on Appendix A to the European Convention for the protection of vertebrate animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes). This Recommendation remains in force, and member states are required to “pay regard” to it. The information has been adapted and/or augmented to ensure it is relevant and specific to the UK.

b To whom and where the CoP applies

If an establishment is licensed for breeding, supplying and/or using animals under section 2C of ASPA it must abide by the mandatory standards within Sections 1 and 2 of the CoP for **all protected animals held at the establishment that will be, are being or have been used for a licensed purpose.**

c CoP sections

Executive summary and Introduction – the legal framework

Section 1 – legal minimum standards applicable until 31 Dec 2016

Chapter 1: Standards applicable to all animals

Chapters 2-10: Species-specific chapters

Section 2 – legal minimum standards applicable from 1 Jan 2017

Chapter 1: Standards applicable to all animals

Chapters 2-12: Species-specific chapters

Section 3 – non-mandatory advice

Chapter 1: Standards applicable to all animals

Chapters 2-13: Species-specific chapters

Bibliography and glossary

d The purpose of Section 3

The purpose of Section 3 of the CoP is to promote a shared understanding between establishments and Home Office Inspectors of the manner in which the requirements of Sections 1 and 2 might be met.

Sections 1 and 2 often refer to a requirement for “appropriate” conditions or provisions. Section 3 provides advice as to what may be “appropriate”.

If an establishment wishes to satisfy the requirements of sections 1 and 2 by means other than those advised in section 3, it is at liberty to do so.

The advice in Section 3 may also be used to discuss and encourage best practice. Establishments should seek to continually improve their standards of care and accommodation in line with the principles of the 3Rs.

e Specifying deviations from CoP standards in Sections 1 or 2

Deviation required for... Process

Scientific reasons

Deviation specified in PPL or PEL after AWERB review and on approval by Secretary of State. Normally only given with specific justification.

Treatment by a vet

Recognised veterinary practice falls under the Veterinary Surgeons Act – no authorisation under PPL or PEL required.

Animal health or welfare

For a short period on isolated occasions: By documented agreement of the named persons (normally NVS and NACWO).
Regular and/or predictable events: PPL or PEL authorisation may be more appropriate – discuss this with your Home Office Inspector.

Recognised animal husbandry

PPL or PEL authority *not* required. Practices may be continued with ongoing agreement of named persons (normally NVS and NACWO).

f Non-compliance with CoP standards

Section 1 and 2: Used to assess whether the care and accommodation provided by the establishment meet the requirements of ASPA and **standard condition 4 of the Establishment Licence**. Failure to meet the legal minimum standards set out in Sections 1 and 2 is likely to result in non-compliance action.

Section 3: As none of the advice in Section 3 is mandatory, it is not possible to be in breach of Section 3.

g Engineering standards, performance and welfare

The species-specific chapters within Section 3 provide suggested ranges for environmental parameters, for example temperature and relative humidity. The intention of providing these ranges is to indicate typical values that will normally satisfy the requirements of Sections 1 and 2 to provide “appropriate” environmental conditions.

However, whether the environmental conditions are or are not “appropriate” will ultimately be assessed by **performance and welfare outcomes**. Examples of indicators that may demonstrate unsuitable environmental conditions include, but are not limited to:

1. presence of respiratory disease in rats that may be attributable to low relative humidity;
2. decreased reproductive performance in mice that may be attributable to a noisy environment;
3. greasy coats in gerbils that may be attributable to high relative humidity;
4. increased aggressive behaviour in pigs that may be attributable to decreased environmental stimulation;

5. decreased growth rates in cattle that may be attributable to inadequate access to food of appropriate quality.

Where there is no impact on performance or welfare the ranges may be extended, with the agreement of appropriate named persons.

Even where the parameters in question are within the suggested ranges, if there appears to be, or may soon be an adverse impact on the animals, appropriate steps should be taken to adjust the parameters so as to avoid that adverse impact. Likewise, being within the suggested ranges *per se* does not necessarily guarantee that conditions are “appropriate” in every situation. Anticipation of potential welfare problems is as important as promptly dealing with them should they occur. Focussing on outcomes and solutions specific to the facility will ensure that standards of accommodation and care are appropriate for the animals.

This principle should also be extended to other advice presented in Section 3 that could be interpreted as engineering standards.

h Updates to the Code of Practice

As understanding of how best to care for animals evolves, the CoP may require updating. Updates may be provided in the form of Advice Notes published on the ASRU website (www.gov.uk/research-and-testing-using-animals), which may then be incorporated into the next formal version. ASRU’s aim is to publish an updated version approximately every 5 years.

We welcome contributions from all sources. Please send your comments to ASRUBusinessSupport@HomeOffice.gsi.gov.uk.

i Frequently asked questions

Q What is the difference between the Guidance and the Code of Practice?

A The CoP primarily relates to the care and accommodation of animals. The Guidance relates to their use in scientific procedures and how to comply with ASPA.

Q Some of the animals kept at my establishment will never be used in scientific procedures or for scientific purposes. Do they need to be housed to CoP standards?

A No. Only protected animals that will be, are being or have been used for a licensed purpose must be housed to CoP standards. “Licensed purpose” includes animals being bred, supplied or used for licensed procedures, or where their tissues/organs will be used for a scientific purpose.

[See Introduction para 3](#)

Q Who is accountable for implementing the CoP?

A The Establishment Licence Holder or Named Person Responsible for Compliance is accountable for ensuring that CoP standards are met.

[See Introduction para 8](#)

Q I have found a better/different way of meeting section 1 or 2 standards that differs from the advice given in section 3. Is this acceptable?

A Yes. Provided you meet section 1 or 2 standards it is up to you how you do it.

[See Introduction para 9](#)

Q How does this CoP relate to the Defra codes?

A Where animals will be, are being or have been used for a licensed purpose Sections 1 and 2 of this CoP are legally binding under ASPA

and the Defra codes are, in general, not applicable. However, this CoP does refer to the Defra codes (in Section 3 Chapter 8) as a source of advice and also uses the Defra codes to help define what we will accept as UK standard husbandry procedures.

See Introduction para 8.4.1 and S3 C8

Q I want to use a metabolic cage for a short period of time. How can this be authorised?

A This is an example of deviation from CoP standards for scientific reasons as the metabolic cage is likely to be smaller than CoP standards, devoid of enrichment and bedding, and it involves single housing which, if the animal is of a social species, is also against CoP standards. It must be authorised in the PPL.

See Introduction para 8.4.1

Q The relative humidity in my rat room has been 5% higher than the range advised in section 3 for approximately the last 6 weeks. The animals are kept in that room for one to two weeks prior to schedule 1 killing. We do not anticipate any animal welfare issues. Is this relative humidity acceptable?

A If no animal welfare issues are observed or anticipated as a result of the environmental parameter then it is acceptable to hold conditions beyond the ranges advised in Section 3, with the documented agreement of the appropriate named persons (usually NVS and NACWO). The relative humidity in this case should be carefully monitored to make sure it does not continue to rise to a point that could be detrimental, and if so, remedial action will need to be taken. Consideration should also be given to the effect of the high humidity on the room finishes and the equipment in it (for example, paint peeling off the walls), to make sure there are no potential health, welfare, performance, 3Rs or science issues caused (for example, an increase in variability).

See S3 C1 para 2.1

Q Can mice and rats be housed in the same room?

A Incompatible species (for example, predator-prey species) may not be housed together. Rats are opportunistic predators of mice. Evidence is equivocal as to whether housing mice and rats in open top cages in the same room is stressful to either/both species. On a precautionary basis, it is advisable to avoid such an arrangement in order to reduce the potential for scientific variability, and in the interests of minimising avoidable potential stressors. Should housing mice and rats in open top cages in the same room appear unavoidable, you should evaluate the likely impact on your proposed use of the mice and discuss this with your local Inspector. There is no evidence to suggest that housing mice and rats in IVCs in the same room is detrimental, provided they are kept in separate racks and the air flow into/out of the racks is set up appropriately.

See S1 C1 para 1.2, S2 C1 para 1.2, S3 C1 para 1.2, S3 C2 para 1.3.1

Q Will double decker rat cages be allowed after 2017?

A For rat housing which includes a shelf area with 18cm or more vertical space (clearance between the shelf and the floor and the shelf and roof), the shelf may count towards the total floor area.

See S3 C2 para 3.3.3

Q Where can I find information about wild animals and genetically altered animals?

A Advice notes are currently being drafted and will be made available on the ASRU website.

Q I've found a really useful resource. Can I contribute it to the bibliography?

A Yes please. We would be grateful if you could email your suggestions to ASRUBusinessSupport@HomeOffice.gsi.gov.uk.

See Introduction para 10.