



Curtin University Standard Operating Procedure

RABBIT HUSBANDRY

Number: HUS 24

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Reviewed:

DATE					
REVIEWER					

Aim/Purpose: To safely and humanely handle and maintain the health of a rabbit colony.

All employees have a duty of care (see Occupational Health and Safety) to ensure their own health and safety, and that of their fellow workers at all times.

ALL ANIMALS MUST BE HANDLED HUMANELY i.e. carefully and kindly.

Procedures

A. Daily:

1. Check cages to determine the health status of each animal, and record appropriately. Check and observe for all signs of illness, injury, or death and check their cages for signs of abnormal body secretions. Clinical signs of illness can include:

- (i) Coat changes eg alopecia, scaly skin, wounds
- (ii) diarrhoea
- (iii) ptyalism (excessive salivation)
- (iv) anorexia
- (v) weight loss
- (vi) nasal discharge
- (vii) ocular discharge
- (viii) head tilt and / or shaking head
- (ix) changes in behaviour or mannerisms, lack of activity



2. Feed as directed by the study requirements – generally pellets and hay.
3. Check each feeder to see if it has become contaminated with urine, faeces, or feed dust. Remove food from the feeder and ensure that the bottom is scraped out to remove any dusty feed, and then refill the feeder.
4. Refill water bottle as needed. Need to use acidified water which should be available and made up for the rabbits.
5. Environmental checks including temperature, humidity, lighting, noise, odours, or maintenance concerns should be noted and reported to the animal facility manager as soon as possible.
6. Refill any supplies used in room.
7. Wipe clean all tables and feed barrels with 70% ethanol
8. Sweep the floor including under the tables and cage units. Mop floor if wet.
9. Documentation: Record temperature, humidity, Am check time, time fed, water checked, shelves cleaned, floor swept, PM check time, technicians initials, and census sheet to reflect daily changes.

B. Twice Weekly:

1. Change the litter tray and provide fresh hay

C. Weekly:

1. All pan liners must be changed once per week. More frequent changes may be required due to cage population, flooding, veterinarian or investigator request.
2. All water bottles, stoppers and sipper tubes must be changed once a week.
3. Mop the floors weekly with F10 cleaner diluted appropriately.
4. Record the weekly changes on the room record.
5. The sides of the cages can be wiped down weekly if needed.

D. Monthly

1. The room should be wiped down and sanitised on a monthly rotation – it is recommended to use 70% ethanol due to rabbit sensitivity to many cleaners.

Rabbit Environment

1. The rooms are kept at 22 degrees Celsius +/- 1 degree.
2. The humidity should be kept between 40-70%
3. The daily temperature and humidity must be recorded daily on the provided sheets
4. The rabbits will be provided with a diurnal cycle of light of 12 hour light/ dark periods which is controlled by an automated system.



Rabbit Enrichment:

Rabbits Enrichment is considered important for rabbits for the same reasons as other species. Enrichment helps prevent boredom, reduces behavioural vices and prevents aggression in social groupings. Enrichment also helps reduce adverse responses and stress in response to human contact. In natural environments, rabbits frequently graze and gnaw on items; as such simulating this type of activity is the basis for the environmental enrichment program.

Examples of enrichment can include

1. Rabbits can be given alfalfa cubes and mineral blocks as a nutritional form of enrichment. This will be dependent on the study suitability
2. Toys such as stainless steel rattles on chains or bells suspended on a chain within the cage.
3. Other toys could include wooden blocks, chew sticks, cardboard boxes.
4. Radios may also be used in rabbit rooms to minimise reactions.
5. Hay should be provided for bedding and something to chew on.
6. The rabbits should be allowed time out of the cage into a restricted area to run weekly. This will be in the playpen provided in the facility

Enrichment toys must be sanitised in the cage washer at least every second week.