

Regulation of Rats, Mice and Birds Used in Scientific Research and Testing



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The MSMR endorses the application of principles of humane animal care and use for all vertebrate animals, including rats, mice and birds, used in scientific study. The MSMR can identify no philosophical or scientific reason for excluding rats, mice, and birds from oversight and protection under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). Moreover, the MSMR believes that rats, mice, and birds can be afforded adequate protection under the AWA without detracting from enforcement of the AWA in other priority areas and without inordinate bureaucracy and expense.

The Massachusetts Society for Medical Research, Inc. (MSMR), takes the position that the humane and responsible use of animals in biomedical and biological research and testing is essential to the prevention and treatment of disease in people and animals. The MSMR supports the humane, appropriate, and judicious use of animals in these activities, provided that their acquisition is achieved in accordance with federal, state, and local law, and that the highest standards for their care and welfare are maintained.

The Animal Welfare Act (AWA) is the Federal law designed to protect animals used in research, testing and exhibition. Under the AWA the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has the authority to develop standards

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for and regulate the use of vertebrate animals in scientific research, including rats, mice and birds. Rats and mice comprise up to 90 percent of animals used in research, product testing, and education, yet rats, mice, and birds have traditionally been excluded from USDA regulations providing protection under the AWA.

The MSMR has always endorsed and promulgated the application of principles of humane animal care and use for all vertebrate animals, including rats, mice and birds, used in scientific study. The MSMR can identify no philosophical or scientific reason for excluding these species from USDA regulatory oversight. In addition, the MSMR strongly supports effective enforcement of the AWA.

The MSMR believes the issue with respect to rats, mice and birds is not whether to give them rights or legal standing, but rather whether these species should be provided some consideration of their interest in avoiding pain and suffering. Rats, mice, and birds are sentient animals and, therefore, should be afforded ethical consideration of their use in research. The MSMR strongly supports this objective, particularly since other sentient species are afforded such consideration.

The ultimate goal should be to provide appropriate protection to all vertebrate species under the AWA, while making their use in scientific research feasible for the betterment of human, animal, and environmental health in our society. The MSMR believes that rats, mice, and birds can be afforded adequate protection under the AWA without detracting from enforcement of the AWA in other priority areas. The MSMR further supports ongoing discussion of how to effectively achieve this goal without inordinate bureaucracy and expense. At present the USDA, the Public Health Service (PHS), the American Association for the Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC International), and state and local agencies set standards for and evaluate the care and use of animals in research, but standards are not uniform, and methods of inspection and evaluation are redundant in some institutions and inadequate in others. Rats, mice, and birds maintained at institutions which are accredited by AAALAC International and/or have an Animal Welfare Assurance on file with the Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare of the PHS are already under significant oversight. However, rats, mice, and birds at institutions which are neither AAALAC accredited nor protected by PHS Assurance receive less scrutiny.

The MSMR advocates consultation with Congress on its intent regarding regulation of the use of rats, mice and birds in research and education, and commitment of the USDA to support regulatory approaches on this issue that do not add unnecessary expense and regulatory burden.

The MSMR pledges to work with the biomedical research and testing community, the USDA, and the U.S. Public Health Service to develop a uniform set of standards for animal care and use, and an efficient, non-redundant system for ensuring compliance. ■