

Letters

Animals in the Lab

"Animal regulations: So far, so good" was the title of Constance Holden's piece on animal welfare regulations (News & Comment, 13 Nov., p. 880). The idea, evidently, is that the more protections there are for animals, the unhappier we get.

Let me suggest that there is another point of view. The more we learn about the complexities of the mammalian nervous system, the more apparent it is that animals suffer significantly even in routine research. Isolation, disruption of social groupings, constant noise, and extraordinary limitations on physical movement are routine in laboratories, so routine in fact that we often ignore their physiological effects on the animals, including immune suppression and increased rates of birth defects, malignancies, and infections. To pretend that animals adapt easily and well to the laboratory environment is at variance with the findings of those who have examined the subject.

Need we be reminded that animal welfare regulations still omit most animals from any coverage at all? The Office of Technology Assessment was forced to conclude in its 1986 report: "Current regulations probably do not affect a substantial percentage of animals used for experimental purposes" (1). Even for covered species, protections are suspended during experiments, no matter how long they continue.

The laboratory inspection system is not and has never been adequate, as the General Accounting Office (GAO) made clear in its 1985 report (2). In the year GAO examined, half the labs in California and New York were not inspected at all. Even so, 114 sites were found to have major deficiencies.

If we are honest, we have to admit that increased regulation is long overdue. While many have gotten used to an essentially unregulated use of animals, the pendulum has only begun to swing the other way. It's about time.

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REFERENCES

1. Office of Technology Assessment, *Alternatives to Animal Use in Research, Testing, and Education* (Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1986).
2. "Department of Agriculture's Animal Welfare Program." (U.S. General Accounting Office report to the chairman, subcommittee on agriculture, rural development, and related agencies, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Congress, Washington, DC, 16 May 1985).

I would like to take exception with the general tone of the article by Constance Holden on animal regulations. Her assumption that most institutions are content with the status quo applies, I believe, only if she talks with administrators. We, at the bench (or in the trenches), are not happy with the current situation.

There is no question that the rewriting and further rewriting of the Public Health Service animal guidelines was politically motivated by the pressures of animal rights activists on some selected congressmen. There was no debate among scientists before the unilateral edict, nor was there any economic impact study before the new rules were implemented.

There is no other profession in which individuals must prove a priori their ethical nature with respect to every act they perform. Imagine if administrators were required to submit their memoranda to a Memoranda Use Committee (MUC) before they were sent out. Each memorandum would have to be reviewed with respect to its usefulness to mankind; the ethical purpose behind it; whether it would offend the sensibilities of vegetarians, tree worshipers, and other people affected by the destruction of trees that writing this memo would cause; and whether it would have any "relevance" to our society. The author would also have to explain whether alternatives to the memorandum have been explored. Of course, technical aspects of such memoranda might have to be sent to experts for outside review. Only after an MUC agrees that the author of the memorandum has complied with all the regulations would it be approved and the author be "free" to send it off. Alterations in the wording of the memorandum would require further review, as it might be open to further interpretation. This scenario, as sarcastic as it sounds, is not far from the ignominy that scientists must endure with the new animal regulations. I am not happy with the status quo. I know I am not alone.

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As the former Assistant State's Attorney for Montgomery County, Maryland, who was assigned to prosecute Edward Taub, I feel compelled to set the record straight. Constance Holden's article on the new National Institutes of Health guide and the proposed Department of Agriculture regulations pertaining to the care and use of laboratory animals states that "animal activists had broken into a laboratory in Silver Spring, Maryland, and made off with 15 monkeys. . . ."

The truth of the matter is that on 11 September 1981, officers, detectives, and evidence technicians of the Montgomery County Police Department entered the Institute for Behavioral Research (IBR) and seized 17 monkeys pursuant to a search and seizure warrant signed by the Honorable John F. McAuliffe, then a judge of the Circuit Court for Montgomery County. Animal activists at no time "made off" with any monkeys.

Holden makes further reference to a "heist" and "break-in" at IBR. There was simply no such activity at IBR.

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Coalition Architects

We were given too much credit (News & Comment, 13 Nov., p. 886) when we were identified as the architects of the new coalition that has formed to seek the end of the production of plutonium and highly enriched uranium for weapons. In fact, this coalition represented a natural joining of forces by arms control and environmental groups that were already working on different aspects of this problem.

There are good precedents for the success of such a national coalition of grass-roots citizens' groups and nuclear weapons policy analysts. It was just such combinations that brought about the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963 and the Antiballistic Missile Treaty in 1972.

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Erratum: The motion of the earth was incorrectly presented in Eliot Marshall's News & Comment article "A matter of time" (18 Dec., p. 1641). If timekeepers did not add leap seconds, the hour of daybreak would slip forward toward noon, not back toward midnight, as in the text (p. 1641, column 3, last paragraph).

Erratum: In the report "YIGSR, a synthetic laminin pentapeptide, inhibits experimental metastasis formation" by Y. Iwamoto *et al.* (20 Nov., p. 1132), the affiliation of authors Y. Iwamoto, J. Graf, M. Sasaki, H. K. Kleinman, Y. Yamada, and G. R. Martin was incorrectly given. These authors are at the Laboratory of Developmental Biology and Anomalies, National Institute of Dental Research, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, MD 20892.