

AAALAC FAQs

7. Reporting animal welfare concerns

My institution is located outside the United States and there is no government requirement for our institution to develop a mechanism for reporting animal welfare concerns, though we have good lines of communication within our institution so that we are certain that any concerns would be discussed with management. The *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* (NRC 2011) describes a number of specific elements of a reporting system. Are all of these required?

AAALAC International recognizes that the regulatory requirement for a defined method for reporting animal welfare concerns is primarily limited to the United States. However, as noted in the *Guide*, it is the responsibility of everyone associated with the animal care and use program to ensure animal welfare. In some instances, this may involve having to make a formal report regarding a welfare concern. Providing a method by which such reports can be made anonymously and without fear of reprisal, and enhancing staff awareness of the importance and means of reporting animal welfare concerns through training, the posting of signage, and other communication modalities are critical elements of the reporting program. It is AAALAC's expectation that such reports will be investigated by the appropriate oversight body (e.g., the IACUC or comparable oversight body) and that any necessary corrective actions will be taken. In addition, AAALAC International should be informed of the results of the investigation and any subsequent corrective measures.

Guide pp. 23-24

Investigating and Reporting Animal Welfare Concerns

Safeguarding animal welfare is the responsibility of every individual associated with the Program. The institution must develop methods for reporting and investigating animal welfare concerns, and employees should be aware of the importance of and mechanisms for reporting animal welfare concerns. In the United States, responsibility for review and investigation of these concerns rests with the IO and the IACUC. Response to such reports should include communication of findings to the concerned employee(s), unless such concerns are reported anonymously; corrective actions if deemed necessary; and a report to the IO of the issue, findings, and actions taken. Reported concerns and any corrective actions taken should be documented.

Mechanisms for reporting concerns should be posted in prominent locations in the facility and on applicable institutional website(s) with instructions on how to report the concern and to whom. Multiple points of contact, including senior management, the IO, IACUC Chair, and AV, are recommended. The process should include a mechanism for anonymity, compliance with applicable whistleblower policies, nondiscrimination against the concerned/reporting party, and protection from reprisals.

Training and regular communication with employees (including personnel such as custodial,

maintenance, and administrative staff, who are farther removed from the animal use) about the institution's animal use activities may reduce potential concerns.