

The RSPCA and laboratory animals



The RSPCA aims to promote kindness and prevent cruelty to all animals. For animals used in research and testing, the Society's primary goal is the replacement of animal experiments with humane alternatives.

Suffering caused by experiments is our main concern, but inadequate transport, housing, husbandry and care can also cause animals significant distress. The RSPCA is committed to campaigning for immediate improvements in all of these areas and major reductions in suffering for as long as animals continue to be used.

The Society takes a constructive, practical approach, liaising with people involved in animal use in government, industry and science. The RSPCA promotes and supports:

- replacement of laboratory animals with humane alternatives
- reduction in the numbers of animals used
- refinement of experiments and all aspects of housing, husbandry and care to reduce animal suffering and improve animal welfare.

This strategy is known as the Three Rs.



www.rspca.org.uk/researchanimals



Most of the Society's work falls into one of the following four essential strategies.

● Changing the laws that require animal use

All new substances that may come into contact with humans, animals or the environment have to be tested to see whether they are 'safe'. This includes all medicines and vaccines for humans and other animals, chemicals used in industry and agriculture, food additives and ingredients for household products and cosmetics. There are national and international regulatory bodies that set out how safety tests must be carried out, and many of their current requirements for testing unfortunately involve animal use.

The RSPCA campaigns for the development and acceptance of alternative tests to replace animals. The Society urges governments, industry and scientists to set out a comprehensive, properly funded and internationally coordinated strategy for replacing or avoiding animal experiments.

● Improving the laws regulating animal use

All animal experiments in the UK are regulated by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA). The Home Office administers the ASPA through a system of licences for laboratories which breed or use animals for research and testing, for research projects and for individuals carrying out experiments. A team of Home Office inspectors assesses projects and inspects laboratories and breeders.

The UK also has to comply with European laws (Directives) that set out how animal experiments should be regulated and how laboratory animals should be housed and cared for.

The RSPCA campaigns for improvements in the implementation of the ASPA that will immediately benefit laboratory animals. This includes more critical questioning of the scientific need and justification for animal use, with higher priority given to animals and their welfare, more emphasis on the Three Rs and greater transparency in the process of licensing research.

The Society also campaigns to improve European legislation and advises on animal welfare legislation and guidelines in many other countries around the world.

● Influencing attitudes towards animals and implementing the Three Rs

The RSPCA believes that all laboratory animals matter as individuals in their own right and they should not be viewed as expendable research tools.

Society staff are closely involved in many different activities that stimulate greater understanding of animals' needs and of the welfare and ethical issues surrounding animal use in science. We visit research and testing establishments to highlight issues of concern and help develop ways of implementing all Three Rs. We speak at scientific conferences, produce extensively researched reports and are members of many influential national and international committees and working groups. This enables the RSPCA to act as an advocate for laboratory animals by raising the priority of animal welfare and providing scientific evidence that will lead to positive change.

● Raising public awareness about the use of animals in research and testing

Whether or not animal experiments are scientifically valid – or morally justified – is a hotly contested public debate. Understanding the nature and level of animal suffering involved, as well as the reasons for animal use, is extremely important in making a constructive contribution to the debate.

The RSPCA is involved in the animal experimentation debate at a high level both nationally and internationally. We campaign for greater openness about animal use, provide public information and educational materials and raise the issue in the media wherever we can to ensure that the suffering of laboratory animals is not overlooked in the hype and excitement surrounding new products, medicines and knowledge.



The RSPCA's science group is the key point of liaison between the Society and the scientific community. It includes a dedicated research animals department staffed with animal welfare scientists who help implement RSPCA policy and strategy on animal experiments.

Conflicting interests

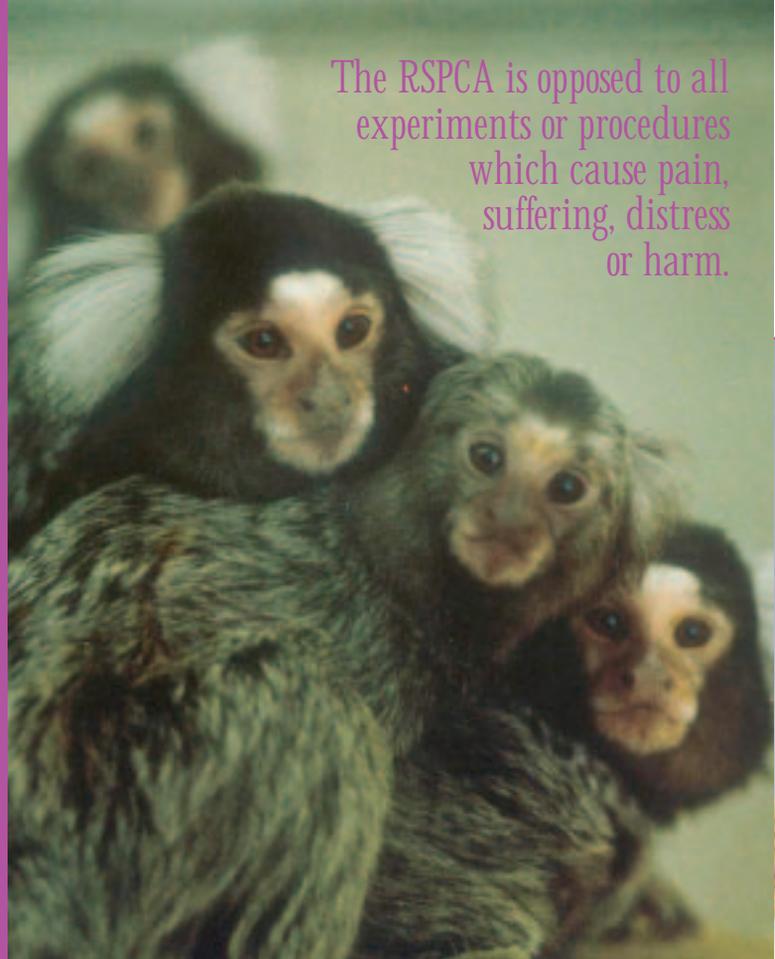
Animals are used for many different purposes in research and testing, and each area of use raises specific ethical, welfare and scientific issues. Most animals are used in the research and development of medical and veterinary drugs, including vaccines for humans and other animals. Many more are used in biological research as 'models' for humans or in studies of how animals themselves function. Others are used in safety tests for new chemicals.

Animal experimentation is an issue that affects everyone and poses many ethical dilemmas. For example, the Society is opposed to all experiments causing pain, suffering or distress, yet advocates vaccination of companion animals to protect them from disease – and vaccines are currently developed and tested on animals.

The RSPCA believes that every area of animal use should be judged individually. The Society promotes more critical questioning of the necessity of and justification for animal use in each case and always strives to reduce the conflict between animals and science.



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The RSPCA is opposed to all experiments or procedures which cause pain, suffering, distress or harm.

How the RSPCA works to help laboratory animals

The Society works in many different ways, depending on the nature of each issue and which particular body we need to influence. The aim is always to achieve genuine, long-term improvements for animals.

To find out more about the RSPCA and animals in research and testing go to:

www.rspca.org.uk/researchanimals



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Registered charity no. 219099 We receive no government funding P43 10.06