



Stop Animal Exploitation Now!

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Dr. Elizabeth Goldentyer, Director,
Eastern Region
USDA/APHIS/AC
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12/10/12

Dr. Goldentyer,

I am writing to you today to file an Official Complaint against the University of Southern Mississippi 65-R-0505. I have recently obtained the inspection report for this facility dated September 11, 2012.

I hardly know where to begin because this is one of the most shocking and disturbing inspection reports that I have ever read. Though this report lists violations of only two sections of the regulations, it is 4 pages in length, disclosing some of the worst animal suffering that I have ever had the displeasure to read about. Overall, I must say that I want to compliment you on the work of Dr. Tami L. Howard. She is a credit to your office.

IN the first paragraph of this inspection report, she emphasizes that it is the responsibility of the facility to distinguish between major and minor deficiencies in their reports, and she states that a major deficiency is one which "IS OR MAY BE A THREAT TO THE HEALTH OR SAFETY OF THE ANIMALS." Clearly, the IACUC of Southern Mississippi University has ignored their responsibilities in this area. The conditions which the animals in the offending study, protocol A1de5, have endured are beyond belief.

This study examines ticks, and as part of this process it utilizes rabbits and hamsters to feed various species of ticks. The level of abuse that this process is allowed to reach is astonishing to me, and I have been reading USDA inspection reports for over 20 years.

Early in the report it states that "Attempts to address this situation appeared to be unsuccessful based on facility documentation. Continued problems with the principal investigator's conduct of the project have not been identified as a deficiency in the program."

"—Rabbit 60RBJT was used to feed *Abyomma maculatum* for 13 days, 1/25/12 through 2/6/12. The protocol states that the maximum number of days this species would be allowed to feed on the animal would be 8 days. Lab staff noted that there was a tremendous damage to the animal's ears. At end of feeding on 2/6 animal has large holes in the ears, ear color was blue, and there was tip necrosis noted on 2/3. On 1/30/12 the animal was noted to be bleeding from the rectum."

Several of the rabbits used in this study are listed as being anorexic and one has a 20% body weight loss. In many instances the ticks are allowed to feed off of the rabbits for periods exceeding the limits placed by the protocol.

The inspection report notes that on 6/22/12 the investigator allowed a visiting high school student to assist in the harvesting of the ticks, despite the fact that the ticks carry a BSL-2 pathogen.

The inspection report notes that on 7/9/12 several rabbits "... were left unattended by the investigator for at least 10 minutes while recovering from anesthesia. . . . The AV had to euthanize 70RBJT later for convulsions."

Rabbit RBJT71, who was used to feed ticks for 9 consecutive days (2 days longer than allowed by the protocol) is described “The rabbit’s ears were red and inflamed and there were wounds at the base of the ears. The animal was frantic and guarding.”

After listing these and other non-compliances the USDA inspector states:

“These noted deviations from the approved protocol appear to be causing stress, discomfort, pain and physical harm to the regulated animals. The principal investigator must not deviate from the approved protocol unless changes are approved by the IACUC. The IACUC must review any proposed significant changes regarding the care and use of animals in ongoing activities and ensure that discomfort, distress, pain and physical harm are minimized or avoided.”

All told, this inspection report recounts 14 separate non-compliances regarding federal regulations.

It is clear from this inspection report that several more non-compliances with federal regulations exist. The way in which the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee failed to distinguish between significant and minor deficiencies, and the way in which the principal investigator blatantly disregarded not only the protocol, but also general safety guidelines, these things all clearly indicate violations of

Section 2.32 (a) Personnel Qualifications, which states “It shall be the responsibility of the research facility to ensure that all scientists, research technicians, animal technicians, and other personnel involved in animal care, treatment, and use are qualified to perform their duties. This responsibility shall be fulfilled in part through the provision of training and instruction to those personnel.”

The way in which the animals were handled constitute multiple clear non-compliances with

Section 2.38 (f)(1) Miscellaneous which states “Handling of all animals shall be done as expeditiously and carefully as possible in a manner that does not cause trauma, overheating, excessive cooling, behavioral stress, physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort.” Clearly, the way in which these animals were handled would qualify as causing “physical harm or unnecessary discomfort.”

It is clear from the statements by the inspector that these animals were denied pain relief, and other treatment, therefore violating:

Sec. 2.33 Attending veterinarian and adequate veterinary care.

(a) Each research facility shall have an attending veterinarian who shall provide adequate veterinary care

(2) Each research facility shall assure that the attending veterinarian has appropriate authority to ensure the provision of adequate veterinary care and to oversee the adequacy of other aspects of animal care and use;

(b) Each research facility shall establish and maintain programs of adequate veterinary care that include:

(3) Daily observation of all animals to assess their health and well-being; Provided, however, That daily observation of animals may be accomplished by someone other than the attending veterinarian; and Provided, further, That a mechanism of direct and frequent communication is required so that timely and accurate information on problems of animal health, behavior, and well-being is conveyed to the attending veterinarian;

(4) Guidance to principal investigators and other personnel involved in the care and use of animals regarding handling, immobilization, anesthesia, analgesia, tranquilization, and euthanasia; and (5) Adequate pre-procedural and post-procedural care in accordance with current established veterinary medical and nursing procedures.

In short, the staff of Southern Mississippi University have exhibited a continuing multi-month pattern of disregard for the well-being of these animals, their suffering, and debilitation.

I know that your office considers major violations of the Animal Welfare Act to be very serious in nature, especially when these violations take the lives of animals. The treatment of animals at this facility illustrates attitudes of carelessness and negligence that must be punished so that meaningful changes can be made. Therefore, I also insist that you take the most severe action allowable under the Animal Welfare Act and immediately begin the process of issuing a fine against the University of Southern Mississippi at the completion of your investigation.

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future about the fate of this facility.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael A. Budkie, A.H.T." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael A. Budkie, A.H.T.,
Executive Director, SAEN

Attachments: Southern Mississippi University USDA Inspection report 9/11/12