

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES
DIVISION OF COMPARATIVE MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

SOP#: 101.1

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TITLE:	Environmental Enrichment of Rabbits
SCOPE:	Personnel with Regular Rabbit Contact
RESPONSIBILITY:	Facility Manager, Technical Staff, Veterinary Staff
PURPOSE:	To Outline Procedures of Environmental Enrichment of Rabbits

I. PURPOSE

1. **Adjacent housing with visual, auditory, and olfactory contact, positive human interactions, and environmental enrichment contribute to the well-being of social species.** Current regulations require facilities to develop a plan to address the social needs of the animals in their care (9 CFR, Subchapter A).
2. **Visual, auditory, and olfactory contact with compatible conspecifics should be provided as the default method of housing rabbits upon arrival.** Rabbits will also benefit from environmental enrichment and positive human interactions.
3. **Exemptions to this SOP due to study restrictions must be justified** by the PI and approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee which has sole authority to grant exemptions. The attending or Clinical Veterinarian has the authority to restrict social interactions for medical reasons.

II. RESPONSIBILITY

1. The Veterinarians oversee all aspects of animal health and are assisted by all program staff.
2. Facility Managers ensure implementation of all procedures.
3. Animal care staff are responsible for the realization of this program.

III. PROCEDURES

Note: Unless exempt from the enrichment program, all rabbits will be tattooed according to ***Animal Identification SOP #015***.

1. **Every single-housed rabbit not exempt due to IACUC approved animal study restrictions or medical reasons as determined by the veterinarian will be involved in the enrichment program.** Animals will be placed in adjacent cages suitable for close housing (i.e., Tecniplast Interlinking System with sliding Plexiglas window-panel). In each cage there is placed a **raised shelf combination nesting box**. In this system, each animal is housed in an adjacent primary enclosure visually linked through a **sliding Plexiglas window-panel**. For compatible neighboring pairs,

- a **perforated** sliding Plexiglas window panel may be used for increasing interactions.
2. Any time two or more animals are allowed to interact there is the possibility of violent conflict (e.g., **incompatible neighboring male rabbits**). Decisions of intervention must balance the welfare of the animal with the animals' need to establish social relationships for themselves. In socially experienced animals, this can be achieved with a single exchange of gestures or postures, whereas socially inexperienced animals may have to learn to recognize submissive or dominant signals, respectively. Measures of intervention must always consider the safety of the personnel first.
 3. Initially, rabbit compatibility of single-housed rabbits is tested in two contiguous cages through the Plexiglas window, which allows for visual, auditory, and olfactory contact. Visual, auditory and olfactory contact will support the establishment of a relationship between the two rabbits and allows personnel to assess the likelihood of an aggressive conflict prior to increasing interactions.
 4. If neighboring rabbits are demonstrated to be compatible, a note is made in each animal's **Progress Notes CMDC #13**. The **perforated** Plexiglas window panel may be placed to increase interactions and this exchange of solid for perforated panel is noted in the **Progress Notes CMDC #13**.
 5. To enhance interactions, a raised shelf combination nesting box and manipulanda will be placed in cages. Available items may include foraging hay, toys dangling from the top of cages, balls with hay for interactive enrichment, and stuffed animals.
 6. Animals will also be offered novel treats such as carrots or bunny sticks.

Approved:

Date: