



## POLICY

<b>TITLE:</b>	<b>Housing of Social Animals</b>
<b>Policy Number:</b>	2016-052
<b>Responsible Department:</b>	Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
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<b>Revised:</b>	11/8/17 (Added rabbits to list of social animals); 7/8/2020 (Added info re: resting male breeders and note re: hamsters not being social animals per USDA)

**Purpose of Policy:** To ensure that animals housed at any facility owned or operated by Western University of Health Sciences (WesternU) are housed in a manner consistent with their normal development and well-being unless experimental objectives or veterinary-related concerns require otherwise.

**Policy Information:** According to the latest edition of the [Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals](#), “Appropriate social interactions among members of the same species are essential to normal development and well-being” and that “Social animals<sup>1</sup> should be housed in stable pairs or groups of compatible individuals unless they must be housed alone for experimental reasons or because of social incompatibility.” The *Guide* further states that “not all members of a social species are necessarily socially compatible” and that the housing together of socially incompatible animals can induce chronic stress, injury and death. Therefore, it is expected that “Single housing of social species should be the exception and justified based on experimental requirements or veterinary-related concerns about animal well-being” and that single housing of social animals “...should be limited to the minimum period necessary” and, where possible, “...visual, auditory, olfactory and tactile contact with compatible conspecifics should be provided”.

These positions of the *Guide* are supported by an [AAALAC Position Statement](#) which notes that “Social housing will be considered by AAALAC International as the default method of housing unless otherwise justified based on social incompatibility resulting from inappropriate behavior, veterinary concerns regarding animal well-being, or scientific necessity approved by the IACUC (or comparable oversight body.)” and by the [U.S. Government Principles for the Utilization and Care of Vertebrate Animals Used in Testing, Research, and Training](#) Principle VII which states that “The living conditions of animals should be appropriate for their species and contribute to their health and comfort”.

**Policy:** Based on the above policy statements, it is the policy of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) that all animals housed at any facility owned or operated by WesternU be socially housed unless single housing is scientifically justified and approved by the IACUC in an animal use protocol or required for one or more of the following reasons:

- behavioral incompatibility. Examples include, but are not limited to, impeding cage mate(s) access to food, water or enrichment devices; cornering; chasing; overt aggression or fighting

When assessing compatibility, the following guidelines must be followed:

- Grouping of animals unfamiliar with each other should be monitored for at least 10 minutes for signs of incompatibility.
  - If signs of incompatibility are present, animals must be separated and documentation made in the appropriate records.
  - Single housed animals must be provided with additional nesting and enrichment to meet thermoregulation needs and promote species typical behaviors.
- clinical observation or treatment of a sick animal. Following resolution of the problem, it will be at the discretion of the Attending Veterinarian to determine if the animal may be returned to its home cage or if continued separation is warranted.
  - attrition that results in a single animal that cannot be re-paired with other animals
  - breeding colony management-related issues such as females that are separated for copulatory plug checks; separation of pregnant animals in harem breeding settings to avoid cage overcrowding; and males that are resting between mating. Note: Single housing of male breeders should be periodically re-evaluated on a species-specific basis and a determination made if they are still needed for this purpose. If not, group housing of these animals is warranted.

Examples of scientific justification for single housing of social animals include, but are not limited to, animals:

- with surgical incisions with accessible sutures
- with catheters or other devices that might be damaged by a conspecific and result in harm to an animal
- on behavioral protocols where the presence of a conspecific might alter experimental results.

If animals are singly housed for any of the above reasons, it must be for the minimum period necessary and, whenever possible, visual, olfactory, auditory and tactile contact with compatible conspecifics must be provided as appropriate. Positive interaction with the animals care is also provided.

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<sup>1</sup>Social animals include, but are not limited to, female mice, rats, gerbils, guinea pigs, rabbits and zebrafish. Non-social animals include, but are not limited to, male mice (unless littermates housed together since birth), female hamsters and some male hamsters. **Note:** At present, hamsters are the only United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)-covered species that is exempt from social housing as they are not considered a social species.