EXPOSURE CONSIDERATIONS FOR NON-ANIMAL HANDLERS

The Animal Care & Use Committee (ACUC) would like to remind Principal Investigators that animal care and use in the laboratory environment can affect the health and safety of *all* personnel, including visitors from outside the institution; housekeeping and trades personnel; administrative and support staff; and laboratory personnel who are not directly involved in animal use. Accordingly, it is important for investigators to continually ensure strict adherence to occupational health and safety practices when animal use occurs in the laboratory setting, and to educate those individuals with indirect exposure of the potential risks. Some examples of exposure risks commonly encountered in the laboratory setting where animal use occurs are listed below.

- Allergens associated with indirect exposure to animals or animal products, such as dander, which may cause or worsen allergic reactions, including asthma and other serious conditions. Animal handlers are required to minimize potential release of allergens into the environment by minimizing animal caging in the laboratory, placing filter tops on cages, conducting allergen-generating procedures within containment such as a biological safety cabinet or chemical fumehood. Rigorous use of gloves and laboratory coat is essential in minimizing the transport of allergens on street clothes and skin. Routine cleaning of environmental surfaces with moist toweling aids in removing potentially allergenic particles.

- Hazardous chemicals, including anesthetic gases, disinfectants, tissue preservatives and sanitizing agents. Minimizing the use of chemicals, conducting procedures in the containment of a chemical fumehood, use of scavenging devices for anesthetic gases, use of gloves and lab coat, and handwashing are important control measures.

- Infectious disease transmittable between animals and humans (zoonoses), such as Salmonella. Although incident infections are rare with laboratory animals, some laboratories purposely infect animals with infectious agents that may also be infectious in humans. Use of biological safety cabinets, gloves and lab coat, frequent handwashing, and routine surface disinfection are principal measures to reduce risk. Prompt and proper disposal of needles, razors and other sharps minimizes risk of percutaneous injury and infection.

Investigators should give careful consideration to the chemical, biological, radiological, physical and mechanical risks associated with laboratory-specific research and experiments.

More information about occupational health risks, including educational brochures detailing a range of occupational health topics is available on the ACUC homepage.

Concerns or questions about occupational health and safety, or requests for consultation should be directed to Environmental Health and Safety (2-4911).

NOTE: Individuals who directly participate in animal use activity, but who by the nature of their employment status or involvement in a project are not listed as an animal handler on an IACUC protocol must complete and submit a Risk Acknowledgement Form to the ACUC office prior to beginning work on a study. Contact the ACUC office at 4-0405 or acuc@virginia.edu with questions.