*[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:US-DeptOfVeteransAffairs-Seal.svg)***IACUC Training Exercise #4 2013**

The following exercise may be useful in stimulating discussion regarding compliance with the 8th Edition of the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (Guide).* To facilitate discussion, page 1 of the exercise may be distributed to the IACUC members prior to a meeting. After a few minutes of discussion about the exercise during the meeting, the remaining pages of the exercise may be distributed to provide ideas for the committee’s consideration.

*Note: This training exercise was originally distributed on 12/30/13. On 1/6/14, an official response from OLAW was received regarding this training exercise; they found “the example and conclusion to be valid and a good example for training.”*

Dr. Carmine Rossi, the Chair of the Hometown VA-IACUC and Dr. Gina Diaz, the Attending Veterinarian, have been asked to meet with Dr. Peter Easter who has just accepted the Chief of Neurology position at the Hometown VA. Dr. Rossi is familiar with and respects Dr. Easter’s work, but he has a sinking feeling that transferring Dr. Easter’s work to the Hometown VA may be a challenge. When Dr. Easter walks into the conference room, he immediately begins to excitedly discuss his research. He believes that adolescent marijuana use is linked to the development of neurodegenerative disease, such as Alzheimer’s disease, in older adults. He tells Drs. Rossi and Diaz that his goal is to get his ACORPs submitted to the IACUC for review and approval as soon as possible, because he needs to transfer his large colony of Dutch Belted (DB) rabbits and their custom-made rabbit cages to the Hometown VA. In his studies, weaned rabbits receive a highly palatable treat containing a human equivalent dose of THC, the active component of marijuana, twice a week. Some of the rabbits in his colony have been receiving THC for several years. Dr. Easter monitors each rabbit’s growth, activity, and serum chemistry profile, as well as its performance on learning and memory tests. The cages were designed to allow many of the learning and memory tests to be conducted in the home cage. Dr. Easter proudly explains that the cages are commercially produced and meet or exceed all Animal Welfare Act Regulations for rabbit housing. The cages feature a divider panel that may be removed to provide social housing and the 14 inch cage height is more than adequate for DBs.

Dr. Diaz explains that the 8th Edition of the *Guide* sets the minimum height for rabbit cages at 16 inches; to her surprise, all of the color seems to drain out of Dr. Easter’ face. She quickly goes on to say that OLAW guidance allows the IACUC to consider the use of rabbit cages that are 14 inches in height if there is evidence showing that the cages provide sufficient space to meet the physical, physiological, and behavioral needs of the animals. Dr. Easter brightens up a bit and tells Drs. Diaz and Rossi that he has five years of data showing that the growth, development, and behavior of his rabbits are consistent with the published data for DBs. Furthermore, his laboratory staff maintains detailed records for each animal, to document that it reaches breed benchmarks. He can even provide a video of the rabbits in the custom-made cages, to assure the IACUC members that the cages are roomy and the rabbits can make all natural postures and postural adjustments without touching the walls or ceiling of the enclosure. With a collective sigh of relief, Drs. Diaz and Rossi help Dr. Easter prepare his ACORPs, including a deviation from *Guide* standards for rabbit housing.

What type of *Guide* deviation is Dr. Easter requesting? Is it necessary to report it to the IO and/or OLAW?

In this exercise, Dr. Easter is requesting to house rabbits in 14-inch high cages because the design of the cages supports his research and he has historical data to document that the cages meet the physical, physiological, and behavioral needs of the rabbits. The custom-made cages are sufficiently large to allow the DBs to freely make all natural postures and postural adjustments.

The *Guide* states “The space recommendations presented here are based on professional judgment and experience. They should be considered the minimum for animals housed under conditions commonly found in laboratory animal housing facilities.” Table 3.3 entitled Recommended Minimum Space for Commonly Used for Rabbits, Cats, and Dogs found on page 59 lists the space requirements. In regard to rabbit housing, OLAW has provided the following guidance:

*“OLAW concurs with the 8th Edition of the Guide. “Rabbits should be housed under conditions that provide sufficient space... to meet physical, physiologic, and behavioral needs. The height of an enclosure can be important to allow for expression of species-specific behaviors and postural adjustments. Cage height should take into account the animals' typical posture and provide adequate clearance for the animal from cage structures, such as feeders and water devices. Space allocations should be assessed, reviewed, and modified as necessary by the IACUC considering the performance indices and special needs determined by the characteristics of the animal.” (See Guide pages 51-52, 56, 59.)”*

*“IACUCs may consider the use of a rabbit cage that is 14 inches in height, if appropriate. The IACUC should establish, through performance indices related to animal well-being, that the cage provides sufficient space to meet the physical, physiologic and behavioral needs of the animal. For example, the rabbit must be able to hold its ears in an upright position (if this is natural for the breed) and ears must not be forced to fold over by contact with the cage ceiling. OLAW recognizes the necessity of cost-efficiency and the valid concerns of the community about program cost. Programs should function efficiently, but not at the cost of animal welfare.”*

Based on the information provided this is a deviation from a “should” statement that follows a well-established [performance standard](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/positionstatement_guide.htm#performance), it is not a departure from the *Guide*, and no reporting is required to the IO or OLAW.