

University of Southern California
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
Social Housing Policy

A. Background

The purpose of this policy is to outline recommendations set forth for social housing of laboratory animals to comply with housing requirements in the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*, Eighth edition (NRC, 2011). Because social housing is not always possible due to experimental, health, or behavioral reasons, social housing exemptions are also outlined here.

B. Definitions

Conspecifics: Members of the same species

Social housing: Pair- or group-housing social animals of the same species in order to promote well-being and facilitate natural species-specific behaviors

C. Applicability

The aim of this policy is to meet the housing standards set by the *Guide*, while also keeping in mind the special needs of investigators that need to house animals under certain conditions for experimental reasons. We must also prevent injury or illness to animals due to aggression from conspecifics when housed under social conditions that are not appropriate for their species.

D. Policy

Social species such as mice, rats, guinea pigs, swine, dogs, etc. must be housed with conspecifics unless single housing is either justified in the IACUC protocol or deemed necessary by a member of DAR veterinary staff. Therefore, social housing of social species is considered the default unless otherwise noted below.

Social housing exemptions are allowed in the following animal species and situations without additional justification in the IACUC protocol:

- Kangaroo rats
- Tree shrews
- Male rabbits
- Male chickens (roosters)

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- Male mice or rats that are part of a breeding colony and not currently in cages with females for breeding
- Female mice or rats that are part of a breeding colony and are separated for up to three weeks prior to giving birth to their litter. Note that non-pregnant female breeder mice or rats must be socially housed.
- Any animal deemed unsuitable for social housing by a DAR veterinary staff member for health, welfare, or other compatibility reasons.

The above exemptions to social housing are allowed without completion of section 2.1.1 of the IACUC protocol to justify single housing. A purple 'Single Housed' cage card will be placed on the cage with the reason for exemption.

In addition, social housing exemptions are allowed if approved by the IACUC as part of an experimental protocol, with the following guidelines:

- Animals must be assigned to an IACUC approved protocol that requires single housing due to experimental necessity.
 - Examples include behavioral tests that would be affected by housing with conspecifics, individual feeding or watering or measurement of food/water intake, metabolic measurements, and surgical procedures in which conspecifics could interfere with incisions or implants such as electrodes or cannulae.
- The single housing exemption must be listed on the IACUC protocol section 2.1.1 and the question "Will animals be housed individually for any portion of this project?" must be answered "yes" with an acceptable justification that is approved by the IACUC.
 - Animals such as breeder male or female mice or rats described above do not require an additional single housing exemption under section 2.1.1 of the IACUC protocol.

Any other requests for exception to this policy must be described in detail in the IACUC protocol and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The Principal Investigator must have approval from the IACUC before the exemptions to social housing can be implemented.

E. References

1. Committee for the Update of the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, et al. (2011). *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*. 8th ed., National Academies Press. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK54050/>