

**1. PURPOSE**

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The intent of this Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) is to describe an appropriate environmental enrichment program for guinea pigs.

**2. RESPONSIBILITY**

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Facility Animal Care Committees (FACCs), principal investigators (PIs), animal care staff.

**3. PROCEDURES**

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- 3.1. The purpose of environmental enrichment is to provide guinea pigs with opportunities to express basic behavior needs, to promote species-typical, non-injurious, behavior and to promote physical and mental health thus enhancing animal welfare. The environmental enrichment should be biologically relevant (i.e.: hiding, socializing, searching) so that it does not lose its enriching value over time.
- 3.2. Social Contact:
  - 3.2.1. Pair or group house guinea pigs.
  - 3.2.2. Guinea pigs may be singly housed in some cases:
    - 3.2.2.1. Incompatibility.
    - 3.2.2.2. Medical reasons.
    - 3.2.2.3. Specific protocol approved by FACC.
- 3.3. Housing System:
  - 3.3.1. Animals should be housed with the goal of maximizing species-specific behaviors and minimizing stress-induced behaviors.
  - 3.3.2. Guinea pigs scare easily; minimize noise and sudden movements adjacent to housing enclosures.
  - 3.3.3. House guinea pigs in solid-bottom cages with contact bedding, unless specifically described in a protocol and approved by the FACC.
  - 3.3.4. Housing system should exceed the minimal space recommendations for a standard shoe box cage (~143 sq. inches):
    - 3.3.4.1. 2 guinea pigs, if <350g each.
    - 3.3.4.2. 1 guinea pig if >350g (see restrictions to single housing in section 3.2.2).
- 3.4. Dietary Enrichment:
  - 3.4.1. Provide (autoclaved) hay preferably daily, or at least twice a week.
  - 3.4.2. Provide small quantities of fresh vegetables and fruits regularly (2-3 times/week). Vegetables or fruit should be thoroughly rinsed prior to use.
- 3.5. Objects:
  - 3.5.1. Shelter:
    - 3.5.1.1. Provide a shelter.
    - 3.5.1.2. Shelter should provide enough protected space for all cage occupants.
  - 3.5.2. Toys:
    - 3.5.2.1. Provide at least one toy in all cages (e.g. metal or plastic chains or rings mounted on the cage side.)
- 3.6. Exemption:
  - 3.6.1. Exemption from this environmental enrichment program must be justified and approved by the FACC, or prescribed for medical reasons.