

Report on Research Compliance Volume 15, Number 8. August 31, 2018

U. of Michigan Provides Insights Into Inspections of Animal Research Sites

By Theresa Defino

When it comes to conducting required, semiannual inspections of animal facilities, the University of Michigan (UM) has a big job on its hands. Among its three campuses and two “biological stations,” UM has some 600 principal investigators (PIs) engaged in nearly 1,000 protocols utilizing “406,000 square feet of approved animal space.” The research is “primarily biomedical,” although it has “some wildlife studies,” explained Dawn O’Connor, assistant director of UM’s Animal Care and Use Office.

While UM “visits” the biological stations when they are in use in the summer, it inspects “all animal housing facilities and the support areas within the vivarium. We visit all three where live animal procedures are conducted. This includes many laboratories, procedural areas that are shared, and all dedicated rooms used” for those species covered under the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), O’Connor said.

Details about UM’s process were among the topics in a recent webinar on facility inspections held by the NIH Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW). O’Connor was joined by Bill Greer, UM’s assistant vice president for research. He is also executive director and president of the IACUC Administrators Association.

The webinar, one in a series that OLAW hosts several times a year to assist institutional animal care and use committees (IACUCs) with compliance, drew more than 200 participants and dozens of questions.

USDA, through implementation of the Animal Welfare Act, is just one source of requirements that UM must comply with, when applicable. In addition, it and other institutions may also be subject to the Public Health Service (PHS) Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals and the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*.

At the start of the discussion, Greer noted that a “very important” footnote to the PHS policy “gives the IACUC the discretion to determine the best means of conducting an evaluation of the institution’s program and facilities.” The footnote authorizes organizations to “think about different methods and processes to conduct facility inspections in ways that best fit the needs of our own specific institutions and the research portfolios that we support.”

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