Laboratory-Level Emergency Response

Purpose
This guide applies to all laboratory animal researchers to help ensure the well-being of research animals in their labs when an emergency or disaster occurs.

Responsibilities
The individual closest to the animals (e.g. research animal user) is responsible for assessing the situation and the condition of the animals, taking emergency action steps, and providing status updates to and requesting resources from the Director of the Harvard Center for Comparative Medicine (HCCM).

Please plan ahead before a genuine emergency arises by reviewing the following material and working through the necessary steps that your lab might take in the event of an emergency. Document in the laboratory training records when individual lab members have been trained on the laboratory emergency response plan. If you have questions or need additional guidance, do not hesitate to contact one of the individuals listed at the end of this document.

Pre-Emergency Planning Steps

- Know your building, department and local emergency plans. Refer to your local flipchart or poster of EH&S Procedures & Response Guidelines and stay alert for communication and updates from your department’s emergency lead.

- Register for Harvard’s Message Me notification (or your home institution’s mass notification system) so that you are aware of emergencies potentially affecting the campus and its animal facilities.

- Take weather forecasts into account when planning experiments.

- Always maintain sufficient quantities of euthanasia agent(s) to euthanize all animals in the lab.

- Maintain paper copies of emergency contact lists and call trees in both home and work areas. Power/computers/internet access may be unavailable or inoperable during an emergency.

- Verify that critical animal-related equipment (including storage of research materials) is plugged into functioning emergency outlets, if needed.

- To the degree possible, maintain supplies locally that would enable continued animal care during an emergency (e.g. flashlights, rubber boots, plastic sheeting for leaks, emergency extension cords, etc.).

- Investigators are strongly encouraged to cryopreserve mouse strains (embryos or sperm) that are irreplaceable, especially those that do not exist with collaborators elsewhere. If you have specific animals which cannot be replaced in the event of an emergency, please contact your facility supervisor to identify them.
Emergency Action Steps

- Obey all alarms and emergency notifications from Harvard, your institution, or your community (i.e. “Reverse 911 notification”). Human safety is the top priority. Do your best to alert others as you evacuate the premises or, as directed, shelter-in-place.

- If an evacuation is signaled, evacuate first, then return animals to their appropriate animal housing facility if possible to do so (i.e. if animals are housed in a building other than that being evacuated).

- If returning the animals to their animal housing facility is not feasible and/or would cause delayed evacuation, secure the animals in cages and leave immediately.

- Euthanize animals that are in imminent danger and/or would harm themselves without a human attendant if it would not cause a delay in evacuation.

- As soon as building re-entry is authorized by the fire department or police, assess health and safety status of the animals and make efforts to optimize their care:
  - Return animals to their designated housing facility, if possible; if not possible, maintain contact with the animal facility manager/supervisor and;
  - Verify that critical animal-related equipment (including storage of research materials) is plugged into functioning emergency outlets, if needed. When power returns (if affected), reset all equipment and check functioning of equipment;
  - Check animals more frequently in affected areas and report status changes to animal facility supervisors or veterinary care staff. Monitor temperature and humidity. Modulate temperature by increasing ventilation or reducing heat/light load in the room;
  - Cages with limited airflow are of special concern. Thermometer-check temperature inside the cage. Remove animals from behavioral boxes;
  - Animals that are found to be affected by extreme heat/cold/other environmental conditions as a result of the emergency should be removed from the environment and treated or euthanized at the discretion of the veterinary care staff;
  - Call the Facilities Emergency Number if animal lives may be at risk from a facilities-related emergency.

Important Contact Information

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<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Office</th>
<th>Mobile</th>
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<tr>
<td>Director, HCCM</td>
<td>(617) 432-1289</td>
<td>(978) 382-0905</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Director of Animal Care Operations</td>
<td>(617) 432-5552</td>
<td>(617) 270-8410</td>
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<tr>
<td>For Veterinary Emergencies</td>
<td>During business hours, call your facility veterinarian: hccm.med.harvard.edu/files/hccm/files/hccm_emergency_contact_information_v2.pdf</td>
<td>(617) 874-7178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvard Mass Notification Registration</td>
<td>Website: messageme.harvard.edu/faq.php</td>
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1 Unless you have a written site-specific plan approved by the Fire Department through EH&S, you must evacuate immediately if an alarm sounds.