



## CM SOP #408 – Social Housing of Rodents

Original release date: 10/07/2016    Version: 4    Date last revised: 03/01/2026

### I. Purpose & Scope

This SOP establishes standards for the social housing of rodents in Comparative Medicine (CM) facilities. The goal is to promote animal welfare and behavioral health while supporting high-quality, reproducible research.

Rodents are social species, and **social housing is the default standard** unless scientific justification or veterinary concerns require temporary or permanent single housing. This SOP applies to all rodents housed in CM-managed vivaria and to all personnel responsible for rodent husbandry or care.

### II. Roles & Responsibilities

#### Comparative Medicine Staff

- House rodents in compatible social groups whenever possible.
- Monitor animals for signs of social incompatibility or distress.
- Separate animals when necessary due to fighting, injury, or veterinary concerns.
- Ensure cages of singly housed animals are clearly labeled with the reason and date of separation.
- Notify veterinary staff and research personnel when animals are separated due to health or behavioral concerns.
- Document housing changes appropriately.

#### Research Staff, Students, Visitors

- Follow approved IACUC protocols regarding housing conditions.
- Notify CM staff if experimental procedures require single housing.
- Ensure scientific exemptions from social housing are clearly approved in the protocol.
- Collaborate with CM and veterinary staff when housing changes are required.

#### CM Management

- Ensure staff are trained in rodent social housing practices.
- Monitor compliance with this SOP and IACUC policies.
- Address and report non-compliance to the appropriate oversight bodies.

#### CM Director and AV

- Provide veterinary oversight of rodent housing and welfare.
- Determine when animals must be removed from social housing for health or welfare reasons.
- Ensure compliance with federal regulations, IACUC policies, and professional standards.
- Provide guidance regarding behavioral management and stress mitigation.



### III. General Notes & Definitions

Rodents are social animals and should be housed in compatible groups whenever possible.

*The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* states:

- “Single housing of social species should be the exception and justified based on experimental requirements or veterinary-related concerns.”
- “Social animals should be housed in stable pairs or groups of compatible individuals.”

Key principles:

- Social housing is the default standard.
- Single housing should be minimized and justified.
- Animals separated due to behavioral incompatibility should be evaluated for potential re-pairing when feasible.
- Littermates should be housed together at weaning whenever possible to reduce aggression.
- Rodent housing density must comply with current Guide space recommendations.
- Pups may remain with adult animals provided cage density limits are not exceeded.
- Single housing should be limited to the shortest period necessary.
- **Social Housing:** Housing animals in compatible pairs or groups that permit normal social behaviors.
- **Single Housing:** Housing an animal alone due to scientific justification, behavioral incompatibility, or veterinary medical reasons.
- **Behavioral Incompatibility:** Aggression or fighting that risks injury or distress to cage mates.

### IV. Materials & Equipment

- Rodent cages and approved housing systems
- Cage cards
- Single housing identification stickers
- Health concern cards
- Treatment/monitoring cards
- Husbandry logs or room logbooks
- Personal protective equipment (PPE)

### V. Procedure

Conditions Allowing Single Housing

#### A. Behavioral Incompatibility

If animals display aggressive behavior or fighting:

1. Separate the aggressive animal into a new cage.
2. Label the cage card with:
3. “Separated from cage # \_\_\_”
4. Date of separation.
5. Apply a single housing sticker indicating reason and date.
6. Place a Health Concern card on cages of injured animals.
7. Notify veterinary staff and research personnel.

Where possible, animals should later be evaluated for compatible regrouping.

#### B. Veterinary Medical Reasons

Animals may be singly housed for:

1. Illness



- 2. Injury
- 3. Post-operative recovery
- 4. Veterinary monitoring or treatment

Procedures:

- 1. Veterinary staff determine need and duration of separation.
- 2. Place a treatment or monitoring card on the cage.
- 3. Document the reason in the room logbook or medical record.

B. Scientific Justification

Single housing may occur when:

- 1. Required by experimental design
- 2. Approved in the IACUC protocol

*Such exemptions must be explicitly described in the protocol and approved by the IACUC.*

C. Veterinary Authority

The Attending Veterinarian has the authority to:

- 1. Remove animals from social housing when necessary
- 2. Require regrouping or housing modifications
- 3. Implement measures to protect animal welfare

Recordkeeping

A. For animals moved to single housing:

- 1. Create a new cage card
- 2. Record the previous cage number
- 3. Label cage with single housing sticker
- 4. Document the reason for separation
- 5. Alert PI and lab members that the separation has occurred.

B. For veterinary separations, record the reason in the room logbook or treatment record.

**VI. Health & Safety**

- Personnel must use appropriate PPE when handling rodents.
- Proper restraint techniques must be used to prevent bites or scratches.
- Personnel should monitor animals for signs of stress or injury.
- Any animal bites or injuries must be reported according to institutional procedures.
- Animals exhibiting severe aggression should be handled cautiously.

**VII. References & Attachments**

- *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*. National Research Council.
- Public Health Service Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals.
- AAALAC International Position Statements on Social Housing and Environmental Enrichment.
- FAU IACUC policies regarding animal housing.

**VIII. Revision History**

Revision Date	Revision Number	Summary of Changes
12/16/2019	2	Added the single-housed sticker
01/11/2023	3	Added references and minor changes/clarifications
03/01/2026	4	Updated format, updated to reflect current AAALAC



FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

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		recommendations, made ADA compliant
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