Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)

Guidelines on Maintenance of Blades for Use in Decapitation

Date of IACUC Review and Approval: October 3, 2014

I. Background: Decapitation is categorized as “Acceptable with Conditions” for use as a physical method of euthanasia in the AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals: 2013 Edition, which further stipulates the following conditions:

“The equipment used to perform decapitation must be maintained in good working order and serviced on a regular basis to ensure sharpness of blades.” and

“Those responsible for the use of this method must ensure that personnel who perform decapitation have been properly trained to do so and are monitored for competence.”

II. Purpose: The purpose of this guideline is to ensure that the blades used for decapitation of rodents, such as guillotine blades or surgical scissors are kept in working order and that the animals are afforded a humane method of euthanasia in accordance with the AVMA Guidelines.

III. Guidelines: Utilizing a guillotine or dedicated surgical scissors for decapitation must be described and approved in an animal protocol prior to use, per Federal regulations. Personnel using a guillotine or scissors must ensure that they are in good condition prior to use and must be properly trained in their use. Training should be documented by the Principal Investigator of the protocol. Personnel using guillotines or scissors are responsible for their proper maintenance, including cleaning after each use, as-needed lubrication with silicon, and sharpening of the blades. The blade movement should be smooth with no perceptible binding or resistance. The blade must be rust-free, clean, sharp and able to decapitate with minimal force. Frequency of blade sharpening depends both upon frequency of use and the species euthanized. Guillotine blades and dedicated surgical scissors Blades should be sharpened a minimum of every twelve months, when in regular use. Depending on the species and number of animals decapitated, blades may need to be sharpened more frequently.

Log books should be maintained and located with the guillotine or dedicated scissors and these books should include a record of each use. Please see below for further instructions.
IV. **Use of Guillotine/Scissors:**

1. Before using the guillotine or dedicated scissors for decapitation, check for rust, and ease of blade movement and cleanliness.
2. After use, ensure guillotine/scissors are properly cleaned and stored with the following recommendations:
   - Scrubbing the base (guillotine), blades and screw lock (scissors) to remove gross contamination
   - Using a final alcohol rinse to reduce the need to hand-dry the equipment
   - When storing a guillotine, it should be turned upside down with the blades opened to facilitate drying.

V. **Maintenance:**

1. All blades should be sharpened or replaced at a minimum of once every 12 months when in regular use.
2. For personnel safety, only qualified people should take a guillotine apart (if necessary).

VI. **Record Keeping:**

Personnel responsible for the use of the guillotine or scissors used for decapitation should maintain a log book. The IACUC, Federal inspectors or AAALAC site visitors may ask to review this log book during inspections to ensure the following information is documented:

1. Usage tracking (i.e. date, species and number of animals euthanized)
2. Dates of blade sharpening