

Occupational Health – Fact Sheet

Purpose-bred Animals – Assessing Occupational Health Risks

As you study the Occupational Health Fact Sheets, you will find information about many potentially serious diseases that could affect research animals, which could also pose a risk to individuals working with them. K-State has a responsibility to ensure that you are aware of these occupational risks, even though they are usually quite small. Assessing occupational risk is dependent on many factors, including the source and history of the animals.

Purpose-bred research animals are those that are born and raised in carefully controlled conditions and environments for specific uses in biomedical research laboratories or projects. Reputable laboratory animal vendors produce purpose-bred animals that are largely free of the diseases and maladies that can commonly affect animals that are wild-caught or are raised in less controlled circumstances. Vendor/breeder Quality Control and Quality Assurance programs help to ensure and document that purpose-bred research animals are of the highest physical and health quality possible. Virtually all rodents used in research are purpose-bred.

Wild Caught or Random Source research animals are those that are not specifically bred for research and are not raised in controlled conditions that would preclude the risk of being infected with endemic diseases. The health history and disease profile for random source or wild caught animals are unknown, greatly increasing the occupational risk.

The use of healthy research animals contributes greatly to the value of experimental data by reducing unwanted variables. However, an additional benefit of using purpose-bred animals is the significantly reduced occupational risk to personnel.

When purpose-bred animals are used in research activities, the risk of acquiring an infectious disease from the animal falls significantly (does not apply to experimentally infected animals). Therefore, the source of your research animals plays a large role in assessing your occupational risk.

If you have questions about any of these issues, please contact the URCO.