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Effingerstrasse 15, Case Postale
3001 Berne
www.swissuniversities.ch

RESEARCH AND ANIMAL EXPERIMENTATION IN SWITZERLAND: REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

In Switzerland, the field of animal research is tightly regulated by one of the strictest legislation in the world, which promotes ethically responsible research. According to the ranking of the *Animal Protection Index (API)*¹, Switzerland together with Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom are the countries with the strictest animal welfare policy and legislation in the world. The Swiss Animal Welfare Act² aims “to protect the welfare and dignity of animals”. It is the only legislation which recognises the concept of animal dignity.

Regular updates of ordinances and directives regarding animal research ensure that the legal framework is in line with the technological advances and the ethical concerns of the Swiss population.

Cantonal and federal key legal aspects

- Any experiment involving animals must be authorised by the cantonal veterinary authorities, who refer to the recommendations of the independent cantonal commissions on animal experimentation to decide whether they issue, often with conditions, or not the authorisation.
- Independent cantonal commissions are generally composed of veterinarians, scientists, animal protection representatives, specialists in alternative methods and ethicists. The composition may vary from one canton to another.
- The Federal Food, Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO) has overall supervision of animal experiments. It can ask additional questions, impose conditions or appeal against a cantonal decision. An experiment may only start 30 days after the cantonal authorisation is issued, period within which the FSVO may exercise its right of appeal.³
- The Swiss Animal Welfare Act requires that constraint caused by experiments must be kept to a minimum, in particular by using appropriate methods which alleviate or minimise potential pain, suffering and distress, and which enhance animal well-being.
- Since March 2018, in addition to a resource manager and a study director, and his/her substitute, all institutions and laboratories which conduct animal experiments or house laboratory animals must appoint an animal welfare officer (AWO) and his/her substitute.

¹ <https://api.worldanimalprotection.org/>

² <https://www.blv.admin.ch/blv/en/home/tiere/tierschutz.html>

³ <https://www.blv.admin.ch/blv/en/home/tiere/tierversuche/antrag-bewilligung-tv.html>

- *Resource managers* ensure compliance with the animal welfare legislation and with the issued authorisation, report on the numbers of animals used in experiments and promote basic and continuing education of their personnel.
- *Study directors* are responsible for the planning and proper performance of animal experiments in terms of scientific criteria and animal welfare aspects. Special education and other prerequisites have to be fulfilled to be able to act as study director.
- *Animal welfare officers* support the researchers in applying the legal requirements including the 3Rs principle in their research protocols, review all animal experimentation applications before they are submitted to the cantonal authority, provide basic and continuing education and check that the animal facilities and the experiments comply with the regulations. AWOs are either veterinarians or biologists that have expertise in laboratory animal science and welfare.

Control measures

The legislative framework includes control measures:

- Each research project is examined by the competent cantonal authority and, with the exception of those with degree of severity 0, by an independent cantonal commission on animal experimentation.
- Federal authorities also review applications on a random basis and can ask additional questions or impose conditions during the appeal period.
- An experiment involving animals will only be authorised if no alternative methods can achieve the research goal.
- Each application for an animal experiment is subject to a weighing of interests between the burden caused to the animal and the knowledge which is expected to be gained for the society or the environment.
- The competent cantonal authorities as well as the independent cantonal commissions on animal experimentation may carry out unannounced inspections of animal facilities, laboratories and ongoing experiments.
- Any infringements of the Animal Welfare Act's provisions may lead to a ban on keeping, breeding or handling animals.

Ethical principles

- The Ethics Committee for Animal Experimentation of the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences and the Swiss Academy of Sciences developed principles and guidelines "Ethical principles and guidelines for experiments on animals", as well as a guidance "Weighing of interests for proposed animal experiments. Guidance for applicants".
<https://www.samw.ch/en/Portrait/Commissions/Ethics-Committee-for-Animal-Experimentation.html>
- The "Dignity of the animal" study group of the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO) has devised a model procedure to ensure that weighing of interests is carried out correctly and uniformly.
<https://www.blv.admin.ch/blv/en/home/tiere/tierschutz/wuerde-des-tieres.html>

Law and ordinances

- Animal Welfare Act (AniWA; 455)
 - Protects animal dignity and ensures animal welfare.
<https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2008/414/en>
- Ordinance on animal protection (TSchV/OPAn; 455.1)
 - Defines rules on animal handling, use and housing as well as the way interventions are performed on them (e.g. the authorized and forbidden procedures, analgesia, the sizes and minimal requirements in terms of housing infrastructures).
<https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2008/416/fr>
- Animal experimentation Ordinance (AEO; 455.163)
 - Defines rules on laboratory animal breeding, on genetically modified animals, on announcements concerning laboratory animal breeding and on animal experimentation.
<https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2010/207/en>
- Animal Welfare Training Ordinance (AWTO; 455.109.1)
 - Defines which basic education is needed for persons working with animals;
 - Defines contents and minimal duration of education and training courses;
 - Defines the requisite continuing education for persons working with animals.
<https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2008/609/en>
- Ordinance on electronic management of animal experiments (VerTi-V/O-SIGEXPA; 455.61)
 - Regulates the operation of the management information system for animal experimentation (including reports and basic training and continuing education certificates).
<https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2010/563/fr>
- Containment Ordinance (ContainO 814.912).
 - Regulates “the handling of organisms, in particular genetically modified, pathogenic or alien organisms, in contained systems”.
<https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/2012/329/en>