



# Animal Care

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**USDA** United States  
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Agriculture

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service  
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Factsheet

## Compliance Inspections

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) administers the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). This law provides for the humane care and treatment of animals bred for commercial sale, transported in commerce, used in biomedical research, and exhibited to the public.

### ■ AWA Enforcement

APHIS' Animal Care program enforces the AWA primarily through inspections of regulated facilities. To ensure that compliance with the AWA is continually maintained, all facilities that keep animals regulated under the Act must be licensed or registered with APHIS. APHIS officials—veterinarians or qualified animal care inspectors employed by APHIS and trained to identify potential violations of the AWA and its regulations—conduct unannounced inspections of every licensed or registered facility in the country. APHIS inspectors receive special training in the proper care of marine mammals, exotic animals, and animals used in research. Inspectors also receive extensive training in how to conduct inspections at airport terminals, zoos, and commercial animal breeding facilities, among others.

### ■ Inspection Procedures

During an inspection, the APHIS inspector must be given full access to all areas where regulated animals are kept as well as to all records required under the AWA and regulations. A responsible adult must be available to accompany the APHIS inspector. All regulated animals must be shown to the inspector, who may examine any animals. The inspector may also observe how the animals are handled by their caretakers. Dealers, exhibitors, breeders, caretakers, or researchers who interfere with the inspector's duties are in violation of the AWA.

During the inspection, the APHIS inspector examines and documents all areas of care and treatment that are covered under the AWA. This includes observing regulated animals; inspecting the facilities, including enclosure or housing materials and space, as well as food storage; and reviewing records, such as animal acquisition records, medical records, and necropsy reports. If the inspector observes that the facility is not in full compliance with the AWA requirements, he or she will explain to the owner or manager all deficiencies noted.

Once the inspection is completed, the inspector documents any noncompliant items or issues that require correction in an inspection report and takes photographs as needed. For each issue that requires correction, the specific applicable regulation is cited, along with a description of the problem and a deadline by which the issue must be corrected. If deficiencies remain uncorrected at subsequent inspections, APHIS considers legal action.

Repeat noncompliances and serious incidents may warrant enforcement actions such as letters of warning, monetary penalties, license suspensions and revocations, and confiscations of animals.

### ■ AWA Standards

APHIS requires all owners and managers of licensed and registered facilities to comply with certain standards, which vary depending on the species and type of facility. The following are examples:

- **Housing**—Animals must be housed in a structurally sound facility in good repair. The facility must contain the animals and protect them from other animals or extreme weather and temperatures. Drainage systems must also be in good repair.
- **Ventilation**—Animals must be provided with cool air or increased ventilation if the ambient temperature is above 85 degrees Fahrenheit or heat if the temperature falls below 45 degrees Fahrenheit.
- **Lighting**—Facilities must be lit well enough to allow safe and easy access for feeding, cleaning, and complete inspection.
- **Interior Surfaces**—The interior of a facility must be substantially impervious to moisture and be able to be easily cleaned and sanitized.
- **Primary Enclosures**—Animals must be housed in structurally sound enclosures that are in good repair and meet APHIS' minimum space requirements. The floors must protect the animals from injury. The cages must be dry and clean and allow animals easy access to food and water.

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- **Sanitation**—Animal waste must be removed and disposed of regularly and as necessary. Primary cages or enclosures should be sanitized at least once every 2 weeks. Facilities must not allow trash to accumulate.
- **Pest Control**—Facility managers must have an effective program to control insects, ectoparasites, and avian and mammalian pests.
- **Feeding and Watering**—Animals must be provided with nutritious, palatable food that is free from contamination, properly stored, and served in a clean receptacle. Potable water must be made available twice daily for 1 hour if it is not available all the time.
- **Outdoor Shelter**—Animals must be protected from sunlight, precipitation, and extreme temperatures.
- **Compatibility**—Female animals in heat must be separated from male animals except for breeding purposes. Animals with vicious dispositions should be housed apart from other animals. Puppies and kittens should be separated from adult animals other than their mothers. Different species of animals should not be housed together unless compatible.
- **Recordkeeping**—Facility managers must maintain accurate and complete records of the sources of all animals that come into their possession. Managers are also required to keep records of the dates of acquisition and disposition and to properly identify the animals on the premises. These records must be made available for inspection whenever necessary.
- **Adequate Veterinary Care**—Programs of disease control and prevention, euthanasia, and veterinary care must be established and maintained under the supervision and assistance of a veterinarian. A caretaker also must observe the animals daily.
- **Handling**—Every licensee is required to handle animals properly at all times whether he or she is petting, working, feeding, crating, performing, or transferring them.
- **Transportation**—Licensees and registrants are required to provide animals with adequate space, ventilation, and shipping containers during transportation. Most animals transported must be weaned and at least 8 weeks old.

## ■ Additional Information

For more information, contact:

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