Army Ignores Federal Law At Animal Research Facility

An HSUS investigator found several violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act while inspecting the Maryland laboratory where the Army conducts chemical tests on beagles and other animals.

Phyllis Wright, HSUS director of animal sheltering and control, observed "deplorable" conditions for housing animals during a June 25 inspection tour of the Army's chemical warfare research facility at Edgewood, Md. Miss Wright, a former inspector of animal research facilities for the District of Columbia, noted several violations of the standards for housing research animals required by the 1970 federal law. Among the violations were these:

- Approximately 50 beagles housed in an unventilated metal building with an interior temperature exceeding 100 degrees.
- Beagles kept in cages with wire grid floors that allowed the dogs' toe pads to slip between the wire, causing obvious discomfort. No nesting boards were provided.
- Approximately 50 rhesus monkeys acquired from the wild were held in quarantine for 6 weeks in cages 15 x 22 x 22 inches, without any exercise area.
- A room full of adult rats packed 5 each in containers little larger than shoe boxes.
- Miss Wright exclaimed later.

While touring the facility, Miss Wright observed beagles that appeared to be psychotic. "Some of the beagles trembled in terror and hid in corners as we approached. Others defecated and cried uncontrollably," she said.

She attributed the substandard conditions to the Army's failure to adhere to federal regulations for animal research facilities set forth by the Animal Welfare Act and enforceable by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Col. Kenneth L. Stahl, Edgewood commandant, said the post was required to follow federal standards but was exempt from regular USDA inspections because of the classified nature of the experiments. An Army spokesman revealed that 81% of the experiments at Edgewood are classified under contract for other government agencies that do not engage in classified business. When Miss Wright asked the chief veterinarian why the facilities of the unclassified experiments were not inspected, he replied that Edgewood had been exempted from normal USDA inspection procedures.

"If other laboratories must be inspected, then why isn't Edgewood?" Miss Wright exclaimed later.

Miss Wright and Brodrick were only permitted to view animal holding areas during the tour. They were prohibited from reviewing records kept on experiments. No laboratories or other sites of actual experimentation were included in the tour because Army officials feared "a danger of throwing back the progress of the research."

Public protests over government use of beagles for experimental purposes has intensified in recent years. Beagles are chosen for research studies on substances being tested for human use because they are remarkably similar to man in many physiological characteristics. In 1973 HSUS received thousands of complaints concerning the U.S. Air Force's use of 200 debarked beagle puppies for pollution studies. HSUS protested these and other Army experiments using beagles to Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger. Deputy Staff Assistant Phillip A. Farris replied by stating that "there is no ethical or scientifically prudent way to test substances for human use without prior evaluation in living creatures."

In a letter to Schlesinger protesting the recent Edgewood experiments, HSUS President John A. Hoyt said military officials have enjoyed the luxury of conducting their experiments behind closed doors and under the guise of national security for too long. "Neither their objectives nor their techniques have had to stand the test of public scrutiny. Consequently, military officials are rarely required to apply ethical and moral standards other than their own to their work," he said.

HSUS General Counsel Murdaugh Stoski, D-N.J.), and HR 3900 (St. Germain, D- R.I.) would ban the military from using dogs in any biological or chemical warfare research. A House resolution (HQR 42) introduced by Rep. William Whitehurst (R-Va.) would require the federal government to develop new research methods to help reduce or eliminate experiments involving live animals.

Several measures aimed at limiting the use of live animals in federally funded research projects are being considered by Congress. HR 8042 (Hal- stoski, D-N.J.), HR 7981 (Meyner, D- N.J.), and HR 3900 (St. Germain, D- R.I.) would ban the military from using dogs in any biological or chemical warfare research. A House resolution (HQR 42) introduced by Rep. William Whitehurst (R-Va.) would require the federal government to develop new research methods to help reduce or eliminate experiments involving live animals.

In the resolution Whitehurst states: "I regard animal tests as lazy meth- odology. It is obvious that, when al- lowed, the use of animals in such tests is a much easier way of obtaining re- sults. But at what cost? Non-animal techniques are now available, or can be developed, which will provide the needed answers, and in many cases can be more directly related to man than an experiment on an animal. I believe the public is against such lazy, wasteful, and harmful practices. It's time to get the government out of the shabby and morally degenerating busi- ness of torturing animals."

"You can work to stop this cruelty by writing immediately to President Ford, c/o The White House, Washington, D.C., and Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, c/o The Pentagon, Wash- ington, D.C. 20301."

Wire grid floors at the Army's animal research facility cause obvious discomfort to the beagles awaiting chemical testing. This was one of several federal violations found by HSUS.