

Guideline for Collecting and Releasing Animal Images and Audio Recordings

This guideline describes the proper procedures for collecting and releasing photographs, video, and audio recordings of animals (alive and dead) in animal facilities and animal laboratories at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Background:

There are scientific and clinical reasons for obtaining photographs, videos, and audio recordings of animals and animal procedures in animal facilities and laboratories. These materials are useful for documenting clinical care, research, teaching, and/or test results. Public access to these recordings is authorized through federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

NIH Policy Manual Chapter 3047(1) (Trans-NIH Animal Facility Security Program) states that the, “use of audio, photography and video recording devices for imaging animals including but not limited to cell phone cameras, digital/cassette dictation devices, cameras and video recording equipment in NIH owned or leased animal facilities is strictly prohibited except in performance of approved IC Animal Care and Use Committee (ACUC) activities in the animal facility or animal laboratory, or with prior approval by the IC Animal Program Director, or designee, responsible for that specific animal facility or animal laboratory.”

NIH Policy Manual Chapter 1184(2) (Preparation and Clearance of Scientific, Technical, and Public Information) states, “any presentation of information by an NIH employee [or contractor] on a work-related subject, . . . must be prepared according to accepted NIH standards; reviewed for substantive content; and administratively approved. This process both protects the public and the employee. The goal of review is to ensure that NIH releases the highest-quality information and to ensure the accuracy, validity, and appropriateness of materials and products for each intended audience.”

Compliance with the Use of Media in the Animal Program:

All digital images and recordings of animals and animal procedures must be transferred and stored onto a secure, password-protected government computer server. The original recording must be deleted from the recording device immediately following transfer.

The IC Animal Program Director (APD) or their designee can assist the IC Scientific Director by ensuring best practices were used during media collection and animal image modifications required as a condition of release and distribution approval. In general, when taking photographs or videos:

- IC investigators should proactively involve their APD or their APD designee in the staging, content, and review of images, videos, and audio. They should also get the necessary permissions prior to their collection. IC investigators are responsible for obtaining all necessary permissions (including manuscript clearance, as required by IC) for animal images, videos, and audio recordings.
- All recorded procedures on live or dead animals or their tissues in an NIH animal facility or laboratory must be performed according to an ACUC-approved Animal Study Proposal (ASP) or IC guidelines and operating procedures as applicable
- IC ACUCs should establish guidance on appropriate staging and content of animal images,

videos, and audio, including:

- Facility-approved personal protective equipment (PPE) is worn and proper handling and restraint methods are modeled by personnel in images.
- Images of personnel and animal facility images show no articles indicating the location and/or identity of the facility, personnel, or animals.
- Animal procedure recordings show clean surroundings and any images of cages or pens show clean accessories, full water bottles, and stocked feed containers.
- Images are limited to only the area of interest of the animal rather than the entire animal.
- Audio recordings do not contain extraneous comments or excessive background noises
- Only strict aseptic technique is used.

References:

1. NIH Division of Physical Security Management. 3047 - Trans-NIH Animal Facility Security Program: NIH Policy Manual; 2017 [Available from: <https://policymanual.nih.gov/3047>].
2. NIH Office of Communications and Public Liaison. 1184 - Preparation and Clearance of Scientific, Technical, and Public Information Presented by NIH Employees or Produced for Distribution by NIH: NIH Policy Manual; 2026 [Available from: <https://policymanual.nih.gov/manage/chapter/view/1184>].

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