

Understanding Animal Research statement on the closure of Envigo Cumberland VA

Understanding Animal Research is aware of the concerns that have been cited both within and beyond the research community following the closure of Envigo's beagle dog breeding facility at Cumberland VA, USA. Envigo was acquired by Inotiv, an Understanding Animal Research member organisation, in November of 2021.

The site bred laboratory beagles and supplied a large number of research establishments in the United States. Its closure has resulted in the rehoming of around 4,000 dogs. Understanding Animal Research is dismayed at the harm that will have been caused to these animals, both through practices at their breeding site which fell below the standards expected of research animal breeders and through the process of rehoming, which will undoubtedly be distressing to dogs that have been raised in packs and are not socialised to live as human companions.

The difficult decision to close the site was taken by its owners when the multi-million dollar investment and improvement programme being undertaken, with oversight from the USDA, was unable to bring about the changes needed to ensure the required welfare standards rapidly enough. Scheduled upgrades to the site were subject to numerous setbacks related to the COVID 19 pandemic and the company made a series of decisions which, while understandable in context, led in part to the outcomes we saw.

As lockdowns were ordered, dogs bred to be used in labs were no longer needed for research but couldn't be rehomed. The facilities still needed upgrading, but building materials weren't being delivered, contractors couldn't be hired, and animal care job vacancies went unfilled. After working with the regulator, and despite a much-improved USDA report in May 2022, the proposed improvements still could not be delivered in time and as the US Department of Justice became involved, the decision was taken to shut the facility and work with the Department to rehome the dogs - a difficult task today that would have been impossible during the lockdowns.

It is unsurprising that issues that had existed for years, and which had been inherited when the site was purchased, could not be fixed overnight during a pandemic by the new owners, no matter how much money was thrown at the issue.

Yet it is also true that the company continued to trade, didn't euthanise the dogs and didn't rehome earlier. It is down to the US Justice Department to determine exactly where the line lies with regards to appropriate sanctions against the company. Some members of staff have already lost their jobs due to their role in various citations.

Understanding Animal Research supports the humane use of animals in scientific research, including studies in dogs, that bring clear and substantial benefits to humans and animals and could not be



achieved in any other way. We expect our member organisations to treat both animals and staff in their charge responsibly and with respect to their needs. We also recognise the social, cultural and legal distinctions that exist within animal care settings around the world, and the bearing they have on how animals are treated.

Substantiated reports that care has failed within the research sector are taken extremely seriously, both by the regulators and the many workers who strive every day to improve the lives of research animals. While the situation at Cumberland has thus attracted the strongest criticism from the bioscience sector, it can only be hoped that researchers, suppliers, regulators and the animal welfare community continue to work together to ensure that lessons are learned from this situation, and the errors made at this site are not repeated.

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