

IMAGINE a small cube of a cage three feet on a side and three feet high. Within this cube lives a primate — often a baboon or a rhesus monkey — that could weigh as much as 55 pounds.

Baboons usually stand on all four feet, but in such a space they cannot walk anywhere. They cannot stand upright or stretch their arms in such a cage. Yet this is a common caging for the animals used for scientific and medical research in the United States today. Is this humane?

In 1985, Congress refined the Animal Welfare Act with the aim of improving conditions for the thousands of laboratory animals now used in the United States for experimentation and research. As part of that new law, I sponsored an amendment calling for changes in the care of primates — chimpanzees, baboons, rhesus, and other monkeys — to enhance their “psychological well being.”

I had insisted on the amendment after visiting a research facility of the National Institutes of Health outside the Washington metropolitan area. To my shock and dismay, I found that the primates were confined in individual cages about the size of a small shower stall. These well-built steel structures were to be the “homes” of individual animals for several years. I also learned that the “minimum” cage size was commonly used in most research facilities around the country, and that only a few facilities routinely provided even limited exercise out of the cages for the animals.

Neither the researchers nor the animal caretakers viewed the cages as humane care for primates. They believed that they could provide better care and freedom for the primates if permitted to do so. They felt it would neither interfere with the projected research nor dent their budget.

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) has now promulgated regulations to enforce the law, but, unfortunately, has failed on two important issues: primate cage size and the exercise of dogs. We apparently have a ^{promise} to go before the intent of my regulations is fully realized. The new USDA sizes for primates exactly the same cage pounds: The cage must be ^{28.5} weigh up to 105 floor area and seven feet high. ^{28.5} square feet of small cell 3 1/2 feet wide and eight feet ^{28.5} vision a with a seven-foot ceiling and you have the picture. The smaller cages of three feet on a side are deemed suitable for primates weighing up to 55 pounds.

One of the regulations requires provision in the primate cages for “normal postural adjustment” by the animals. Apparently, NIH and USDA believe “normal” adjustments are met as long as the baboon confined in one of the three-foot cubes can

Let's Have Humane Treatment Of Our Fellow Primates

By John Melcher

‘Jane Goodall — the emotional distress of confined primates’

stand on all four feet, turn around and sit down. But what about standing upright, lying down stretched out, or stretching their arms out to the side or overhead? Before being caged, the baboons could make all of these “postural adjustments” whenever they felt like it.

Some labs view periodic release from the small cages to larger ones for exercise as essential in caring for their primates, but unfortunately most research facilities only meet the minimum requirements, which make no special provision for exercise. In some research institutions animals live in their cages for years and are only occasionally let out. On the rare occasions when they are taken out of the cages, the animals almost always are sedated — so exercise is out of the question.

A few hours or days for transportation purposes in such cramped quarters might be considered acceptable, but is it humane for the animals to be so confined for months, a year, 10 years?

During the five years of regulation-drafting, many research facilities were voluntarily upgraded. That is a fairly normal occurrence, so it is mystifying that USDA would leave the cage size requirements exactly where they were prior to 1985 (with the exception of primates over 105 pounds).

Congressional intent on exercise for dogs is also not met in the new regulations. Christine Stevens, co-founder of the Society for Animal Protective Legislation, pursued for more than a decade a requirement that laboratory dogs be released from their cages daily for exercise.



Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole (R-Kan.), myself and others agreed that this would be specifically required in the 1985 amendments. Dole stated on the Senate floor that the language meant release of the dogs from their cages.

But the new regulations require only that individually caged dogs be released. This excludes dogs that are confined two-at-a-time in a double cage system or in other groupings.

USDA officials offer, as a rationale for this, that dogs in double cages can exercise all the time and thus need not be released. But the regulations also set cage sizes for such widely used lab animals as beagles that exclude true exercise: Double cages for two beagles confined together need not be longer than double the length from the nose to the base of the tail, plus six inches. That is not enough room for exercise.

The USDA veterinarians add that since another regulation provides for daily cleaning of the cage, in the case of a double-size cage with two beagles, the only feasible method would be to remove the beagles to clean the cage. In other words, while the dogs are out of the cage they can exercise as they wish.

But the National Association of Biomedical Research complained that the dog exercise provision was an expensive added cost. And although it would be easy for USDA regulators to require a 15-20 minute daily exercise period out of the cage for dogs when their cages are cleaned, the voluminous document ignores the issue.

There is an axiom that the best medical

Switzerland by Eisenhower's offic-