



WILDLIFE ETHICS COMMITTEE

Reporting adverse events policy

All researchers are required to report unplanned deaths and unexpected events that impact on animal wellbeing. These must be reported to the Wildlife Ethics Committee (WEC) promptly, via the Executive Officer (EO). Where an unexpected death of an animal occurs, the researcher must be able to demonstrate that an attempt was made to determine the cause of death.

Adverse event

An event that does or may impact on the wellbeing of an animal i.e. something that is not good from the animal's point of view, including being painful and/or distressing.

Unexpected event

Unexpected means an event that is not as described in the approved proposal, i.e. it is not expected by the Committee. The researcher may consider the event "normal", but if it has not been taken into consideration by the Committee when assessing the welfare impact, benefit and justification of the activity then it must be reported.

Unplanned death

An unplanned death is any death that is not an expected and planned part of the research. If a study animal dies from natural causes unrelated to the research activities, this event should be reported as soon as it occurs, but the report should indicate that it is not an adverse event.

Reporting an unexpected adverse events

Notifying the WEC of unexpected adverse events is a requirement of the Code of Practice. Reporting adverse events assists the WEC to monitor activities, particularly where field work is conducted in remote areas and site inspections are not carried out. It encourages researchers to investigate the cause/s of the event. By sharing this information, findings can be used as a basis for developing prevention strategies that improve animal welfare and research outcomes (refinement). Reporting helps the Committee to be proactive in introducing preventative strategies if these are indicated.

Reporting of an event

Anyone with responsibility for the research animals should notify the Committee about events that have occurred, or that may impact on animals they are using. Reporting is not limited to the Primary Researcher, however it may be appropriate for this person to submit reports on behalf of all personnel involved in the project. If any person, whether a member of the public or a research participant has concerns regarding the care or treatment of any research animal or the conduct of a project they may report the matter to the Committee.

Notifying the WEC

Reports should be made 'promptly'. The actual timing of the report will depend on the researcher's access to telephone or email, and the severity of the impact on the animals. Severe events and events that have implications for current activities should be reported as quickly as possible. All the information for a detailed report (e.g. full necropsy results) may not be known immediately. In this case a brief 'prompt' notification should be made to the Executive Officer advising them that a more detailed report will be provided later.

Reportable events

Any unexpected, adverse events that may impact on the wellbeing of an animal must be reported, and any unplanned deaths. Consideration should be given to reporting events that have mild implications on significant numbers of animals, events that could be more severe in future (near misses), or events that have implications for other animals in current or future activities. This can assist with development of prevention strategies to improve animal welfare.

Examples of when an event report is required:

- Deaths of animals not described in the proposal e.g. lizards killed by ants in a pitfall trap; animal found dead a week after surgery to implant a transmitter.
- Complications not described in the proposal e.g. animals develop abscesses under an adhesive bandage used to attach a transmitter.
- More deaths or complications occur than described in the proposal e.g. 10% of animals die during a study when a 5% natural death rate was expected, justified and approved.
- Field emergencies that do or may compromise animal welfare or the success of the activity e.g. wild fire or flash flooding prevents researchers from accessing the trapping site to make the scheduled checks.
- Facilities or management practices result in problems for the animals e.g. birds show signs of getting sore feet due to the type of flooring in a holding enclosure.
- The procedures are having a greater negative welfare impact than described and approved e.g. animals are behaving abnormally or appear to be in more distress than expected following fitting of a radio-transmitter.

Necropsy

A necropsy is the examination and dissection of the dead body of an animal in order to determine cause of death. Where the cause of death is not known or obvious, a necropsy should be performed whenever possible. Consider preserving the carcass (whether necropsied or not) and offering it to the SA Museum, as it may yield useful information.

Performing a necropsy

In accordance with the Code of Practice, a necropsy should be performed by a person with appropriate qualifications and/or experience. Normally this would be a veterinarian and/or veterinary pathologist.

How do I avoid making many reports for things that happen as a normal part of studying animals?

A report is not required if the Committee knows that the event may happen and the event has happened as expected and approved. If a researcher has explained in their application the type and extent of events (such as natural deaths) that they expect will occur, and if the events happen as

expected, such events do not have to be reported as adverse events. These events should be included in the annual and/or final reports. Check with the Executive Officer.

Example of when an event report is NOT required:

- Expected deaths of animals as described and approved in the proposal e.g. a researcher studying Yellow-footed Antechinus (Marsupial Mouse) in the wild has outlined that they expect 100% of the males to die in their first year shortly after mating as this is the natural life-cycle for this species.

Adverse event reporting

Less significant events or where there are no implications for current or future activities may be reported simply as a brief email for the Executive Officer to note. More significant or severe events, particularly those suggesting that modifications to the scientific procedure are required, should be reported in more detail. Researchers should seek advice from the Executive Officer on whether a brief or detailed report is required.

When reporting an unplanned death:

- A brief summary of the project and description of animal use/procedures
- What animal/s died, and when.
- Explain the circumstances surrounding the death/s and cause if known.
- Photographs can be very useful, and should be provided whenever possible.
- Give necropsy details (If a necropsy has not been performed, please provide an explanation as to why not).
- Describe what immediate and longer term steps are being made or considered to investigate causes and develop future prevention strategies.

When reporting an adverse event:

- A brief summary of the project and description of animal use/procedures
- Describe any event that has had an impact on animal wellbeing or any complications that may impact on the wellbeing of an animal used in the study.
- Photographs can be very useful, and should be provided whenever possible.
- Describe what immediate and longer term steps are being made or considered to investigate causes and develop future prevention strategies.

What will happen once I have made a report?

The Executive officer will consult with the Executive Committee of the WEC. If the Executive Committee are satisfied that the researcher has taken the appropriate measures to avoid a recurrence of the situation then the report is presented to the WEC at the next scheduled meeting. If the WEC decides that urgent or further investigation is required, further contact with the researcher and or available assistants, and (if indicated) consultation with relevant Department for Environment and Water staff. Following an investigation, a project may be allowed to continue with or without modification, or may be suspended pending further review if necessary.

REFERENCE

Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (8th Edition 2013)

CONTACT

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