RAT HOUSING GUIDELINES

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Purpose
Rats are generally acquired as purpose-bred weanlings or adults directly from a vendor or other institutions. Sometimes it is necessary for investigators to either breed rats in the Office of Laboratory Animal Care (OLAC) facilities or purchase pregnant rats to use the young pups. In all cases, rats must be housed according to conditions described in the Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (Guide) unless otherwise noted. Investigators who find a recommended procedure to be incompatible with the scientific needs of their research may submit a written request for the Animal Care and Use Committee (ACUC) to consider an exception to these guidelines.

Guidelines

- Rats are housed in cages with 123 inch$^2$ of floor space. The following guidelines are based on estimated weights of rats at various ages. This information will assure that, as the rats age and grow, they will meet the floor space recommendations in the Guide. Investigators are responsible for weighing adult rats at least every month and separating animals according to these guidelines.
  - House adult males no more than 2 per cage (older rats weighing greater than 500 grams should be housed one animal per cage).
  - House adult females ($\leq 400$ g each) no more than 3 per cage.
  - Pups should be weaned at 21 days of age.
  - Weanling rats may be housed at 5 per cage, but must be housed as adults when they reach 6 weeks of age.

- The Guide now lists 124 in$^2$ as the recommended floor space for housing a female rat and her litter. Given rat social dynamics and a lack of any observed adverse effects in the current standard caging, UC Berkeley allows one male, one female and their unweaned litter in breeding cages.

- These guidelines are based on estimated weights of outbred rats. Exceptions to these guidelines are possible if certain rat-strains have predictably lower or higher weights. Requests for exceptions based on weights of individual animals should be discussed with OLAC veterinary staff. If the exception is to be used on a continuous basis, it must be described in the animal use protocol and approved by the Animal Care and Use Committee.
• The OLAC staff monitors animal health daily but is not responsible for management of rodent breeding colonies. The investigator must check all breeding rat cages and pregnant females at least three times every seven days to ensure that weaning occurs on time and cages adhere to the guidelines listed above.

• OLAC reserves the right to separate immediately, or change the cage of any animals, when animal welfare concerns exist.

References