

New Hire Training and Environmental Enrichment – Building the Foundation for a Lifelong Commitment

Michael Savidge, Training & Compliance, Huntingdon Life Sciences, East Millstone, NJ, United States

In research today, enrichment is of paramount importance in work involving animal models. How do we ensure that the individuals we have in place are always mindful of providing enrichment, whether it be something tangible like a treat reward or the simple act of petting a dog on the head and speaking in a friendly, reassuring voice. By incorporating enrichment into our company's training program we teach the new hires that every interaction with an animal is viewed as a time to provide enrichment. This message is only strengthened as the new hire advances from the initial training program to their permanent department. The importance of enrichment should not be a surprise to anyone working in a laboratory animal environment and the requirement to provide this enrichment is routinely stressed and ultimately mandatory for all personnel working at Huntingdon Life Sciences for a number of reasons. First, the animals welfare while under our care is a primary responsibility which lends itself to good science as minimizing stress will help to keep the animals in good health, producing better research models. Leading by example has proven to be a positive way to demonstrate and grow understanding that enrichment is fully incorporated into every task we perform. When entering an animal room, the positive reinforcement begins. Speaking to the animals and interacting with them is contagious. New hire trainees follow suit and join in with positive voice commands and presenting treats in response to compliant behavior or in an attempt to create a healthy human-animal bond. In summary, by having the training of technical and husbandry related skills intertwined with positive reinforcement and various other enrichment provisions, individuals learn that there cannot be one without the other. Enrichment and working with animals are inseparable.