

Group Pen Housing of Female Rabbits

Jennifer Callahan¹

Jennifer Bielawne²

- 1) Rodent Toxicology, Huntingdon Life Sciences, East Millstone, NJ, United States
- 2) Rodent Toxicology, Huntingdon Life Sciences, East Millstone, NJ, United States

In Toxicology facilities, rabbits are often housed individually in suspended stainless steel cages on mobile racks. Although it appears to be more efficient and cost effective in terms of routine husbandry, this cage system often isolates the rabbit physically and socially. Single housing minimizes normal species specific behavior, including digging, grooming, foraging, standing and hopping. Abnormal behavior often associated with social isolation, such as bar chewing, pawing at the corners of the cage and over grooming, are undesirable and may confound toxicological effects and undermines the welfare of the animals in our care. Additionally, cage size places limits on the weight of animals that may be housed. Group-housing animals in floor in pens provide greater flexibility of space utilization. The ability to provide additional cage furniture and bedding affords animals opportunities to interact with their environment and each other in a more natural manner. At HLS it is our belief that wherever the study design permits animals should be housed in pairs or groups. Offering this type of environment also increases contact between technicians and animals and provides a housing model that is more amenable to the handling and manipulation procedures associated with toxicology studies.