GIRCOR
Rehoming laboratory animals

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Introduction

This guide provides useful information for the rehoming\(^4\) of animals used in research or originally intended for this purpose. It is intended for animal breeders, suppliers and users.

The rehoming of laboratory animals implies the compliance with regulatory conditions detailed in this guide.

It also requires take over by a hosting structure that guarantees as much as possible the preservation of the welfare of the animals for their entire lifespan.

This guide does not apply to the setting free of animals in their natural habitat, which meets the same requirements as rehoming, but only targets endemic wild animal species (birds, fish, amphibians, mammals).

This guide was prepared by the GIRCOR\(^2\) based on the Laboratory Animal Rehoming Guide by the GRAAL\(^3\) and recommendations from its members.

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\(^1\) “Rehoming” generally stands for the adoption of animals. Many aspects also apply to setting animals free in a suitable environment

\(^2\) [www.recherche-animaie.org](http://www.recherche-animaie.org)

\(^3\) [www.graal-defenseanimale.org](http://www.graal-defenseanimale.org)
1 Animal species

This guide is relevant for animals covered by the regulation on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, that is to say vertebrate animals, as well as some cephalopods.

The animals most often rehomed are from pet species (dogs, cats, ferrets, rabbits, rodents, fish), equines, farm animals (pigs, sheep, cattle, goats) and exotic wild species (Primates).

2 Responsibilities

Decisions must be approved by the head of the establishment or equivalent. If there are no internal procedures for animal rehoming, the person in charge must be kept informed and validate the steps.

Rehoming of laboratory animals should be considered:

- if their euthanasia is not required for reasons related to science, regulations or the preservation of their general condition and well-being;
- and if it is not useful or necessary to keep them in the establishment for scientific or regulatory reasons;
- and if there is no plan to reuse them.

When animal rehoming is considered at the stage of animal research project design, the establishment’s ethics committee is informed as part of the project authorization application.

Rehoming may as well be offered within establishments, independently from the research projects.

In any case, the final decision on animal rehoming will be taken at the end of the procedure where relevant, based upon the veterinarian’s opinion.

In the establishment, it is up to the Animal Welfare Body to provide advice on animal rehoming programs, including on the necessity to socialize the animals to be rehomed.

Finally, one must not forget to check that the establishments need to check they actually own the animals they intend to propose for rehoming.
Rehoming of laboratory animals is governed by Article R. 214-112 of the Rural and Sea Fisheries Code.

**Article R. 214-112**

Amended by Decree No. 2017-1246 of August 7, 2017 - art. 12

Rehoming or setting free of animals used or intended to be used in experimental procedures, in an habitat suitable for the species, may be authorized by the prefect of the department where the animals are to be placed or set free, provided that:

- the animal’s health, certified by a veterinarian, allows it;
- there is no danger to public health, to animal health and to the environment;
- appropriate measures are taken to preserve the animal’s well-being.

Breeders, suppliers and users who intend to place animals must have a rehoming program guaranteeing the socialization of the animals to be placed.

If need be, a rehabilitation program is set up for wildlife animal species before releasing them into their natural habitat. Setting free animals in a natural environment is subject to the prior grant, depending on the animals involved, of necessary dispensations in accordance with paragraph 4 of Article L. 411-2 and paragraph 2 of Article L. 411-3 of the Environment Code or of necessary authorizations pursuant to Article L. 424-11 of the same Code.
The establishment must have a preparation program that helps socializing the animals (see Chapter 4). The prefect of the department where the rehoming will take place may authorize it, provided that:

- a health certificate issued by a veterinarian establishes that the health of the animal allows rehoming;
- there is no danger to public health, animal health and the environment. The establishment must decide in this direction, which requires the preservation of each animal’s data;
- the appropriate measures have been taken to preserve the well-being of the animal which requires a good knowledge of the rehoming facility.

Rehoming cannot be considered if the animal has been involved in hazardous experiments involving biological, biotechnological, chemical, behavioural or other risks.

Confidentiality and ownership must be respected. As such it is necessary to ensure for each animal:

- the absence of a contractual clause of non-dissemination;
- the absence of secrecy’s obligation;
- the absence of patents protecting the results or products.

4 Rehoming preparation program

The transition from a breeding or animal research facility to a totally new and unknown environment implies an adaptation period for the animals.

This is especially true for animals like dogs that will be adopted by individuals.

This period of adaptation or socialization will include, as far as necessary in this case, the habituation to human interactions, to noise and to the outside environment.

For Primates, preparation for rehoming may require establishing compatible groups whose composition may differ from that previously existing in the establishment.
This adaptation phase may require several weeks or months. Animal preparation has to be managed within each establishment, by competent professionals (veterinarian, ethologist) or in accordance with published recommendations. Ethologists partnering with GRAAL offer programs and recommendations.

If the institution does not have a standard adaptation program, it must at least present a program suitable for each animal subject to rehoming.

5 Hosting facility and intermediary stakeholder associations

The hosting structure (individuals or professionals) must provide sufficient guarantees that the animals will be well cared for, during their whole lifespan and that, for wild animals such as Primates, they will not be a danger to people, to other animals or to the environment.

Some institutions have developed contacts with hosting structures. This is the case for horses for instance. However, these partnerships require time and skills that all institutions do not have.

The use of intermediary organizations such as the GRAAL or White Rabbit⁴, is essential for many institutions. These associations gained skills and experience in many aspects of animal rehoming: documentation, authorizations, adaptation, transportation, animal’s evaluation, assessment of adopting structures and contacts.

The GRAAL has allowed the adoption of many animals of various species (fish, birds, rodents, dogs, cats, ferrets, farm animals, Primates).

The use of such organizations limits the research institutions’ responsibilities to their fields of competence and ensures compliance with best practices at all stages of rehoming.

The use of an intermediate structure of recognized reputation is therefore strongly encouraged including for adoption by staff if the establishment does not have specific skills and networks.

⁴ www.white-rabbit.org
6 Transfer

A transfer document is signed between the head of the transferring institution (internal liability procedure) and the assignee (physical person, intermediate or host structure as the case may be).

The transfer can only be implemented after receipt of the agreement of the prefect (or by delegation, of the Departmental Directorate for the Protection of Populations) of the department where the animals are intended to be rehomed. A transfer certificate will afterwards be forwarded to the prefect by the institution.

After the transfer, the following documents are sent to the transferring establishment in charge of animal monitoring:

- a copy of the veterinary certificate authorizing rehoming;
- a copy of the approval of the prefect of the department where the animals are intended to be rehomed;
- a copy of the signed transfer document;
- as the case may be, details of the animals being rehomed with their identification, while preserving confidentiality and industrial property.

Rehoming will be recorded in the animals’ individual records as well as in the annual national statistics on the use of animals for scientific purposes.

7 Transport of the animals

The regulations that apply are those of the Rural and Sea Fisheries Code, which concerns the transport of live animals.
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