

Fact Sheet — Animal Experimentation

Experiments on living animals (called “vivisection” from the Latin words “sectus,” to cut and “vivis,” life) involve cutting, performing surgery, or other invasive treatment on a living organism. Vivisection is performed in universities, medical schools, pharmaceutical companies, on farms, by Defense Departments of countries, and by commercial facilities that provide animal-testing services to industries. Most animals are bred for research purposes, but some are caught in the wild or supplied by municipal pounds. It is estimated that over 100 million animals are used worldwide, although accurate numbers and species are not available because regulations do not require that these figures be reported.

Dissection (cutting up of animals in schools) is performed annually on more than 20 million animals worldwide. Most animals used in dissection—including amphibians, birds, snakes, turtles, fish, and invertebrates—are taken from the wild, even though the population of many of the species is declining, in some cases, to the point of extinction.

Most animals who are the subjects of vivisection die during the experiments or are euthanized afterwards. Many who survive the experiments are “recycled” into additional experiments. Some are kept for years in barren holding facilities until they die. A lucky few are rescued by animal protection organizations that negotiate their release and transport them to sanctuaries.

Who Funds the Experiments?

Most experiments are government funded, using billions of taxpayer dollars worldwide. Many experiments are duplicative, either having been conducted before or going on simultaneously in other parts of the world.

What Types of Experiments Are Done?

Product testing includes applying agricultural and industrial chemicals, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and household products into the eyes, on the skin, or force-feeding the substances to many different species, including rabbits, dogs and cats.

There are no restrictions on what type of experiment can be performed. They include medical procedures, psychological experiments, testing of weapons, drugs, poisonous chemicals, and electric shocks. Animals are burned, blinded, deprived of food and water, isolated and confined in small enclosures.

Arguments for and Against Animal Experimentation

There are ethical and scientific arguments against animal experimentation. Supporters of animal research believe that nonhuman animals are essential tools to be used for potential human benefit. Opponents of animal research, including many scientists, argue that animal testing is unnecessary, bad science, an outmoded habit, and an inefficient use of resources because its costs outweigh its benefits. They claim it diverts funds and time away from more productive research and from providing help to suffering people, that it is poorly regulated, that it gives the public a false sense of security about

substances tested on animals, and that animals have an intrinsic right not to be used for experimentation.

Many scientists are choosing more accurate and more compassionate alternatives to animal testing, such as epidemiology, computer and synthetic models, molecular biology, cell cultures, using data from the human genome project, clinical trials, exposure assessments, and other technologies.