



Home Office

Lord Sharpe of Epsom OBE
Parliamentary Under Secretary of
State

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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
House of Commons
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8 December 2022

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 21 November to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on behalf of a number of your constituents about the use of animals in science. Your email has been passed to the Home Office and I am replying as the Minister with policy responsibility for this area.

The UK's strengths in research and innovation put it at the forefront of global science. The Government is committed to supporting this science base whilst delivering a rigorous regulatory framework of protections where animals are used.

The use of animals in science supports the development of new medicines and cutting-edge medical technologies, for humans and animals, as well as supporting the safety and sustainability of our environment. Animal research has helped us to make life-changing discoveries, from new vaccines and medicines to transplant procedures, anaesthetics, and blood transfusions.

Animal testing is required by global medicines regulators to protect human health and safety. Many products which would not be safe or effective in humans are detected through animal testing thus avoiding harm to humans.

Animal testing of chemicals is, in some cases, required under UK law and is dependent on the chemical and quantity manufactured, to protect the safety of workers exposed to material in high amounts, consumers and the environment when chemicals may find their way into waterways, soil or atmosphere.

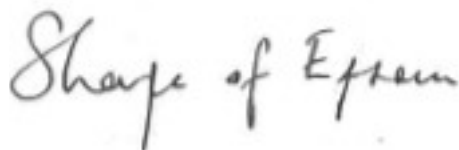
The Government is also clear that animals must be protected. The legal framework in the UK ensures that animals are only ever used in science where there are no alternatives, where the number of animals used is the minimum needed to achieve the scientific benefit, and where the potential harm to animals is limited to that needed to achieve the scientific benefit.

The UK regulatory framework has a rigorous approach to the application of the 3Rs (Replacement, Reduction and Refinement) in all applications for programmes of work involving animals. Establishments conducting research must have robust internal governance systems and processes that ensure the regulated activities carried out at the establishment are undertaken in accordance with the principles of the 3Rs.

The use of animals in science is highly regulated, including a three-tier system of licensing which licenses each establishment, project, and individual involved in performing regulated procedures involving animals. All establishments are required to have dedicated individuals including veterinary surgeons with legal responsibilities for the care and welfare of animals, and an ethical review body, which reviews any proposals for the use of animals and promotes the 3Rs of animal use. The UK regulator conducts an integrated assessment of the compliance of all licence holders including on-site inspections. The Home Office has published and enforces standards for the care and accommodation of all animals bred, supplied or used for scientific purposes.

Our application of the 3Rs principles continuously evolves with scientific developments, including new approaches that do not use animals. New approach methodologies have the potential to reduce the use of animals, improve the efficiency of drug research and development, and to deliver safer, cheaper, and more effective medicines to patients. The Government continues to actively support and fund the development and dissemination of the 3Rs. This is achieved through UK Research and Innovation who fund the National Centre for the 3Rs and research into the development of alternatives through Innovate UK, the Medical Research Council, and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

The Government is clear that the use of animals in science is justified, for the benefits it brings to human, animal and environmental health and safety. Alongside this, the Government supports the replacement, reduction and refinement of the use of animals in science – principles that remain valid. The existing legislative and regulatory frameworks provide an appropriate delivery of these two objectives.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Sharpe of Epsom".

Lord Sharpe of Epsom