



Stop Animal Exploitation Now!

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1081-B St. Rt. 28 #280
Milford, Ohio 45150
513-575-5517
www.saenonline.org

Dr. Francis Collins, Director,
National Institutes of Health
National Institutes of Health
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

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Dr. Collins,

I am writing to you today regarding the 100 chimpanzees who are scheduled to be retired from research. These chimpanzees are currently in the hands of the New Iberia Research Center. While I am pleased that the NIH has designated these chimpanzees "permanently ineligible" for use in experimentation, I am very concerned about the choice of their future home.

The facility to which they are scheduled to be relocated, the Texas Biomedical Research Institute (formerly known as the Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research) has a long record of violations of the Animal Welfare Act and negligent deaths of primates.

As you may know, early this year the Texas Biomedical Research Institute was fined \$25,714 for one incident in which a young primate died due to overnight exposure to the elements, as well as two incidents in which other primates had escaped. Multiple incidents of escapes, as well as the death of a primate due to exposure are clear incidents of negligence.

However, the negligence doesn't stop there. We have obtained an Annual Report of Research Facility form dated May 1, 2009, filed with the USDA by TBRI. This report details the deaths of many primates which appear to be connected to negligence or inadequate veterinary care. The report states: "1 NHP was euthanized for dehydration due to accidental interruption of water on the weekend." This incident clearly exemplifies totally inadequate observation of primates at SWFBR as well as insufficient monitoring of equipment. It should not require the death of a primate to ascertain that SWFBR had a plumbing problem.

This report also discusses at least five primates used in studies of pathological conditions who were simply "found dead." This raises serious concerns as to whether these, and potentially other animals, received adequate veterinary care, if they were observed adequately, etc. This is extremely important because these animals are described as suffering severely. The report mentions conditions such as: "labored breathing, 15% weight loss within two weeks, complete anorexia for 24 hours, fever greater than 105 degrees F, appearance of maculopopular rash, lethargy, thrombocytopenia, severe bruising, or petechia." These symptoms are clearly very severe and would cause substantial suffering on the part of the animals involved in this project.

But, the negligence at this facility goes even further. A USDA inspection report for TBRI (formerly the Southwest Foundation of Biomedical Research) dated April 3, 2007 relates an incident in which a post-mortem dissection was started on a baboon who was not yet dead. This incident clearly indicates untrained personnel, inadequate monitoring of research procedures and general incompetence.

In summary, it is very clear that this facility, the Texas Biomedical Research Institute, has a long-term pattern of negligence regarding the primates in their care. While there were clearly concerns for their health and well being while at the New Iberia facility, I fear that you may have dumped the chimps out of the frying pan and into the fire by sending them to the Texas facility. The record of care at the Texas Biomedical Research Institute is no better than that at the New Iberia Facility of ULL.

Additionally, I must ask why these chimpanzees are to be transferred to an active laboratory if they are “permanently ineligible” for research? Or is the idea to maintain them in a laboratory setting, just in case NIH policy changes?

I must also ask why these chimpanzees were not transferred to a sanctuary. You may be aware that the North American Primate Sanctuary Alliance (NAPSA) offered to provide sanctuary for these chimpanzees, as long as they were provided with the funding necessary for their care, essentially the same funding that would be going to the Texas Biomedical Research Institute. The statement of this sanctuary association can be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/notes/north-american-primate-sanctuary-alliance/napsa-statement-nih-must-reconsider-decision-to-transfer-chimpanzees-from-one-re/348481568577446>

In short, I must say that while I applaud your agency for taking the step of declaring these 100 chimpanzees “permanently ineligible” for use in research, I must insist that you reconsider their final destination. They MUST NOT go to the Texas Biomedical Research Institute. I would prefer it if you pick a location, such as a sanctuary, that is at least capable of discerning if the primates in their care are alive or dead.

I will expect a response from your office within 10 business days.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Budkie, A.H.T.,
Executive Director, SAEN