

Questions and Answers: Inspection Procedures in Response to an Incident or Adverse Event

Q. What is an incident or adverse event?

A. Incidents and adverse events at facilities regulated under the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) include but are not limited to: floods, fires, or other facility disasters; animal mishandling or escapes; attacks and fighting between animals as a result of incompatibility; human injury as a result of an animal attack; failures in HVAC systems, automatic feeders, or watering systems; and injury or death related to cage washers, environmental enrichment devices, and squeeze or guillotine mechanisms.

Q. Should incidents and adverse events be reported to Animal Care by the licensee/registrant?

A. There is no regulatory requirement that licensees or registrants report incidents or adverse events to Animal Care (a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service [APHIS]), with the exception of an event that results in the suspension of a protocol at a research facility. Licensees and registrants may choose to report incidents or adverse events in order to advise Animal Care of the situation, provide documentation of their corrective actions, and demonstrate their good faith intention to comply with the AWA and regulations.

Q. Will incidents and adverse events be cited as noncompliance items (NCIs) on an Animal Care inspection report?

A. These types of events will not be cited as NCIs if (1) the licensee/registrant found the problem in a timely manner, (2) the incident or adverse event was not reasonably foreseeable, (3) the licensee/registrant took timely and appropriate corrective action to prevent a recurrence, (4) there is not an ongoing pattern of violations at the facility, and (5) there were no serious animal welfare impacts as a result of the event. However, if there were serious animal welfare impacts, the problem was not identified and/or corrected in a timely manner, the incident was reasonably foreseeable, or there is an ongoing pattern of violations, Animal Care will cite the event as an NCI.

Q. Will incidents and adverse events that are cited get a correction date?

A. An NCI that resulted in serious animal welfare impacts will be assigned a correction date. If applicable, the inspector may document on the inspection report that the NCI was corrected during the inspection. If the citation is a repeat of a previous citation, the NCI will be listed as a Repeat NCI on the report, and no correction date will be given.

Q. Will Animal Care inspections in response to incidents or adverse events be announced?

A. Routinely, Animal Care conducts unannounced inspections to determine if facilities are in compliance with the AWA regulations and standards. In an effort to ensure that a facility has appropriate personnel and documentation available, Animal Care may conduct an announced visit to evaluate an incident or adverse event. These post-incident visits do not, however, take the place of regular, unannounced compliance inspections.

Additional Information

For more information about the AWA and its regulations and standards, visit the APHIS Animal Care Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_welfare. You can also contact the program's headquarters office at:

Animal Care, APHIS-USDA
4700 River Road, Unit 84
Riverdale, MD 20737-1234
Phone: (301) 851-3751
Fax: (301) 734-4978
Email: ace@aphis.usda.gov

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.