



National group calls for a ban on warfare experiments

Animal Aid, the national campaign group, today launched a new campaign to raise awareness of, and ultimately stop, all warfare experiments involving animals. Animal Aid contends that all animal experiments are cruel and unreliable, but that warfare experiments are particularly heinous. This is because they involve intentionally exposing animals to compounds, weapons or blast injuries which are known to cause terrible suffering and death in humans.

Porton Down, near Salisbury, is the UK site most commonly associated with warfare experiments, including those on animals. Animal Aid has discovered that thousands of animals each year are used at the site, which is shrouded in secrecy. The latest figures available, for 2017, show that 3,865 animals of various species – including monkeys, mice and pigs – were experimented upon at Porton Down.

Today, Animal Aid highlights the terrible suffering inflicted on animals during warfare experiments, through analysing some recently published work involving guinea pigs, which was conducted at Porton Down.⁽¹⁾ The guinea pigs had a nerve agent called VX applied to their backs in order to see how a chemical – known as a bioscavenger – would alter the effects of VX. VX has been described as causing blurred vision, drooling, excessive sweating, eye pain, nausea and vomiting in humans at low doses. A large dose can cause fits, a loss of consciousness, paralysis and a failure to breathe, potentially leading to death.

- The guinea pigs had devices implanted into their bodies to record their temperatures.
- Later, surgery was performed to cannulate a vessel in their necks. The animals were also permanently 'tethered' - connected to a pump, via tubing.
- Several days later, the guinea pigs were poisoned with VX. The VX, which was made at Porton Down, was applied to a clipped area on the animals' backs. The dose was higher than that needed to kill the animals.
- Once the guinea pigs showed obvious signs of poisoning, they were given various injections, depending upon which study group they were placed into.
- The animals were observed, continuously for 8 hours and then at intervals for up to 2 days. They were given a score based on their condition: the higher the score, the worse the condition. Dead animals were scored 31.
- The symptoms being 'scored' included 'no meaningful voluntary movement', 'gasping', 'continuous tremor', 'production of tears' and 'writhing'.
- The animals were killed at the end of the study or when they became too cold or had lost too much weight. Dead animals were dissected.
- All of the guinea pigs who did not receive the drug being studied died within 10 hours of being poisoned.

- Another experiment ⁽²⁾ again involved guinea pigs being exposed to VX. 37 males were operated upon, but for numerous reasons, 8 were removed from the study. The fate of one group of animals is outlined - *'The conditions of animals treated with atropine alone continued to deteriorate throughout the study until death'* and these poisoned animals *'died between 2 and 6h post-poisoning'*.

A 2007 paper compared the effects of a class of compounds on the molecule in humans and guinea pigs, which is affected by nerve agents. This paper casts doubt on the use of the guinea pig to determine how well these compounds will work in humans, stating the *'guinea pig may not be a suitable animal model for the evaluation of nerve agent antidotes'* and that some potentially useful compounds to protect against nerve agents *'that are suitable for humans may be dismissed based upon their poor efficacy in guinea pigs'*.⁽³⁾

Says Jessamy Korotoga, Campaign Manager at Animal Aid; *'Animals suffer and die in so many different types of animal experiments, but there is something especially dark and troubling about warfare experiments. To deliberately expose live animals to compounds, simulated blasts and biological pathogens which are known, and indeed developed, to cause extreme suffering and death, is morally unconscionable. A civilised society, in the 21st century, should not be involved in such macabre and terrible practices.'*

References

- 1) Mann, T.M. et al (2017) 'Bioscavenger is effective as a delayed therapeutic intervention following percutaneous VX poisoning in the guinea-pig', *Toxicology Letters*, doi.org/10.1016/j.toxlet.2017.11.029
- 2) Whitmore, C. et al (2017) 'The efficacy of HI-6 DMS in a sustained infusion against percutaneous VX poisoning in the guinea-pig', *Toxicology Letters*, doi.org/10.1016/j.toxlet.2017.11.007
- 3) Luo, C. et al (2007) 'An *in vitro* comparative study on the reactivation of nerve agent-inhibited guinea pig and human acetylcholinesterases by oximes', *Biochemistry*, vol.46, pp.11771 - 11779

Notes to editors

- For more information on warfare experiments and Porton Down's history: web address to be confirmed.
- For more information or to arrange an interview with Jessamy Korotoga, call 01732 364546 xtn 236
- To find out more about Animal Aid: <https://www.animalaid.org.uk>
- The Guidance on the Operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, the law which regulates animal experiments, states that 'Project licences will not be granted for programmes of work involving the following...developing or testing offensive weapons (but we may consider licences for developing and testing ways of protecting or treating service men and women, or the population as a whole)'