

Safe and Proper Transportation

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Stop and think for a moment about the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and requirements that come into play within your animal facility — HVAC, light, disinfection, feeding, watering, animal protection, employee protection, cross-contamination, documentation...the list goes on and on. As an accredited research organization, you have made the commitment to uphold standards that result in a happier and healthier environment for your study subjects.

Now, stop and think about whether the methods you use to transport animals measure up to those same standards mentioned above. Some will be able to say yes, others will say no.

As the tools for proper animal facility management have evolved over the years, so too have the tools for proper animal transportation. Animal facilities now enjoy one of the greatest luxuries available in any business today—CHOICE. You may now choose between isolators and racks, automated or manual watering and feeding systems, food, filtration, etc. Similarly, you may now choose between various methods and materials when shipping or receiving animals to or from virtually any facility in the world.

Crating

Without question, the most important component of successful transport is proper crating. Virtually every breeder of rodents in the world today offers their transport crates for sale. Each company offers its own unique list of crate features and benefits. In some cases, the crates that they ship their production animals in can be autoclaved and re-used. Some features to keep in mind when selecting the crates for your next shipment should include rigidity, ventilation, reusability, compartmentalization, clear-lid or opaque lids, and security. Both Taconic Farms and The Jackson Laboratory offer reusable transport crates. Charles River Laboratories, Harlan, and Simonsen Laboratories offer disposable transport crates. Specialized transport crates are also available from Charles River and Transport Container Corp. Consult with each company's local representative for construction specifics and pricing.

Next in line for consideration when packing your rodents for transport are proper food and moisture sources. Always put at least one extra day's worth of nutrition in the crates, even if the animals are only moving across town. Remember that just because the animals left your facility at 10:00 a.m. and were delivered across town at 11:00 a.m., that they were not necessarily unpacked immediately upon arrival. While some may laugh at the idea of placing water bottles in transport crates, many shippers still do this. Whenever possible, utilize a moisture source that is a gel. SE Lab Group, Charles River Labs, Transport Container Corp., and Harlan all offer gel-based moisture sources. While gel will offer the necessary hydration source, it is not nutritionally complete and must be supplemented with dry rodent feed. Properly

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supplied, crated, and transported, rodents regularly survive up to ten days in transit.

Environmentally Controlled Ground Transport

Once the animals are packed, the true journey begins. Options abound when it comes to shipping methods — temperature-controlled ground, next flight out, air freight, local courier, taxi. (Don't laugh too hard, many shipments every day are transported in the front seats, back seats, and trunks of taxis all over the world.) Your decision as to which type of service to use will be based on many factors which may include climate sensitivity of the animals, urgency, and cost. Without question, the best method of transporting animals is in an environmentally-controlled truck from point-to-point. Options available in this mode of transport are temperature-specific transport vehicle disinfection (not just sanitization), temperature validation, light cycling, insurance, and constant communication with drivers. While this method undoubtedly provides the animals with a controlled environment, it has not always been readily available in every market around the country or world. While some transporters will say they offer this option in every postal code of the world, it is simply not the case. The good news is that this type of service is now available in more and more cities/regions in North America and continues to grow in availability. The equipment utilized by these providers most often has primary as well as secondary power supply, high and low temperature alarms, fresh air exchange, and in-vehicle GPS tracking capability. When the welfare of the animals is the most critical factor, ground transport with a true animal transport company is the best way to ship. Companies that offer these services include TransporTech, Animal Port Huston, and Frame's, among others, all are USDA registered.

By Air

Next Flight Out air transport offers expedited door-to-door service for animals that can travel by air and do not need to be isolated from all other potential cargoes. In a few cases now, the Next Flight Out carriers are offering local pickup and delivery with those ground services that are uniquely equipped to transport animals. In cities where those ground services are not currently available, every effort is made to ensure that the local delivery company adheres to standards that are at the very least acceptable, but may not in all cases be considered ideal. The true benefit to this type of service is time. In most domestic locations, delivery can be made the same day as pickup. In most international locations delivery is made the next day. Airline bookings are made the day the order is placed, local pickup and delivery agents are alerted at that same time, and if applicable, pre-clearance at customs is arranged. Time is saved in this type of shipment because the cages are handled as baggage on the airline, as opposed to cargo. When tendered to the airlines in this manner, live animals are the last items put on a plane and the first to be taken off. When urgency is the most critical factor and animal welfare is a close second, then Next Flight Out air transport is the best way to ship. Companies that offer these services and are USDA registered include TransporTech, Frame's, Marken Time Critical, AirNet, and World Courier, among others.

Air cargo shipping is next in the service line. This option offers acceptable but not ideal transit times (generally one to three days domestically) and is relatively inexpensive. Pickup and delivery methods and equipment vary greatly from carrier

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to carrier and from city to city. In some cases, the carrier will offer a pickup and delivery service, but is never equipped with insulated, climate-controlled vehicles. In other cases, the carriers will request the shipper to drop off the animals and for the recipient to pick them up at the airport/cargo facility. When budget is the critical factor and the animals are not what would be generally considered to be of high value and are a relatively hearty strain, then air cargo is the way to ship. Companies that offer these services include BAX Global and Menlo (formerly Emery), among others, and USDA registration is irregular, especially when considering the local pickup and delivery aspect.

Other Ground Transport

Lastly comes local courier companies and taxi services. These services are very inexpensive, almost never offer equipment that would be considered ideal for proper animal transport, and very few are USDA registered.

Insurance

All services mentioned above should offer cargo insurance to provide reimbursement to the shipper in case of total loss. Insist on insuring the value of the mice and not accepting the basic coverage amounts.

Transporting Regulated Species

The “choice pool” gets shallower when you introduce regulated species into the mix. While the USDA registration component may or may not be considered important in the transport of non-regulated species, it is an absolute must for regulated species. Few commercial airlines will accept non-human primates and swine for transport, thus leaving ground transport and air cargo as the only available options. Check with your transport company prior to shipping to confirm IATA (International Air Transport Association) requirements for crating and packing.

The day of the rodent as a USDA regulated species draws nearer. As many of you are already aware, the USDA has decided to classify rodents as a regulated species. The regulations have not been published as yet. The National Academy of Science (NAS) and Institute for Laboratory Animal Research (ILAR) have formed a committee to recommend guidelines to the USDA for rodents as regulated species.

Documentation

Documentation requirements will vary dramatically, depending on what type of animals you are sending as well as where they are going. The USDA does not currently regulate the domestic transport of rodents, birds, or fish but most likely will in the future. If you are shipping rodents internationally, the USDA does however, require an export certificate to be completed prior to export. (This requirement will vary by country. Check with your carrier for local rules and regulations.) All other species are subject to USDA oversight while in transport both domestically and internationally. For domestic shipping, you will need to complete a Record of Disposition, Sale, or Transfer form to give to the USDA Registered transporter. Documentation for international shipments can vary dramatically by country and exact requirements should be obtained from your carrier. For starters, virtually every country will require a USDA Export Certificate, a Health Certificate, and a Pro Forma Invoice. Exact wording of the Health Certificate will vary from

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country to country, as health requirements change.

Summary

The industry of animal transportation barely existed 35 years ago. A few companies offered basic services. As animal models have improved, therapies and drugs have improved, and more and more universities have become involved in animal research, the entire industry has grown. With that growth, the transportation services too, have grown. No longer should it be acceptable to just hope that the animals arrive at their destination safely. Choices are there and should be explored fully. The animals are housed in exceptional facilities today and deserve to be transported exceptionally as well.

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