

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-REPORTING:

Deviations from approved protocols have the potential not only to compromise the welfare of animals used in research, but also the scientific validity of research as well as the speed at which research is completed. PIs are often in the best position to recognize protocol violations and act. It is always in a PI's interest to self-report known or observed protocol violations rather than to leave it to UAF staff or IACUC personnel. Everyone makes mistakes, but it benefits PIs, researchers, research subjects, and the University to handle issues that arise promptly and responsibly.

QUESTION: What to do, if you discover as the PI, that a protocol violation has occurred in your lab?

ANSWER:

1. Ascertain whether the welfare of any animal on the protocol in question is in immediate danger. If so, first, provide immediate first aid to the animal (where appropriate), then call the attending veterinarian, and inform the UAF staff.
2. As soon as any immediate issues concerning animal welfare are addressed, gather all the relevant facts from everyone working on the protocol to determine what happened, when it happened, and why it happened. In particular, try to determine whether the violation occurred due to miscommunication, a misunderstanding between researchers (PI, post-doc and/or students), human error, and/or negligence. Summarize all your findings (with dates where possible) in writing whilst everything is still as clear as possible in your mind.
3. Develop a corrective action plan to avoid future protocol violations. What this will consist of depends on the type of violation that occurred. For example, misunderstandings between people working on the protocol (e.g., "But I thought you were going to do that.", "No, I thought you were going to do that") can be avoided by the use of white board(s) in the lab spelling out tasks and timelines for lab members. Also, students can report completion of very important tasks (e.g., feeding of animals on food restriction) to the PI (e.g. via daily text messages). This is a useful and quick way to avoid a student forgetting something that has potentially serious consequences for everyone working on the protocol, if the error may endanger the welfare of the animals on the protocol.
4. Inform all relevant personnel working on the protocol in writing of your corrective action plan, but also make sure to speak to them in person where needed to ensure they understand the changes to procedures in the lab.
5. Send the IACUC as soon as possible a report of 1) what has occurred when and why, 2) what corrective action plan you have put in place, and 3) how and when you informed your personnel of this change in procedure.