



PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

December 1, 2020

Timothy D. Sands, Ph.D.
President
c/o Lisa Wilkes
Special Assistant to the President
Office of the President
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Via e-mail: lwilkes@vt.edu

Dear President Sands:

Thank you in advance for your time. I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 6.5 million members and supporters worldwide regarding disturbing new evidence that we have obtained documenting the apparent euthanasia of animals in Virginia Tech (VT) laboratories in response to COVID-19—contrary to the school's earlier, misleading media statement described below. This raises the question why—since the laboratories so readily disposed of these animals—taxpayer dollars are being used to buy, breed, trap, or experiment on them in the first place.

Based on the information below, we urge VT to do the following:

- 1. Rectify its statements regarding its COVID-19 contingency plan to show that experimenters did euthanize animals confined in its laboratories**
- 2. Reimburse to any federal or state sponsoring agencies the funds used to purchase, breed, confine, feed, maintain, administer veterinary services to, euthanize, and dispose of animals deemed nonessential and killed as a result of VT experimenters' responses to COVID-19**

As part of its COVID-19 contingency plan, VT urged its experimenters to “have contingency plans in place” that “include provisions for terminating studies and euthanizing animals.”¹ In our letter to you dated April 16, we pointed out that this directive likely led to the killing of countless animals deemed nonessential by staff members. On September 17, VT's assistant vice president of university relations,

¹Virginia Tech. (2020, March 27). *Animal Care and Use FAQs*. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Virginia-Tech-COVID-19-directive-regarding-animal-research.pdf> source of this information has been updated (<https://www.research.vt.edu/covid-19-updates-impacts/faqs/animal-care-use.html>).

Washington, D.C.
1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

Norfolk
501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

Berkeley
2855 Telegraph Ave.
Ste. 301
Berkeley, CA 94705
510-763-PETA

Info@peta.org
PETA.org

Affiliates:

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

Mark Owczarski, stated that the university “did not mandate any animals to be euthanized due to COVID-19.”² However, documents obtained by PETA through a Freedom of Information Act request show that current and former employees apparently did euthanize animals as part of the university’s response to the pandemic:

- On March 18, Jennifer Rainville, postdoctoral associate at the School of Neuroscience Hodes Laboratory, wrote, “I realize that now is probably not the best time for you to take on more training mice, but I thought it was worth checking before I euthanize these mice tomorrow. (I’m also likely going to be reducing our numbers of WT [*sic*] mice in 55)”³
- On March 18, senior research veterinarian Amy Rizzo wrote, “I would love to take [the mice], but we’re also in the process of decreasing our colony of training mice to just a few cages. I’m sorry ... but please go ahead and euthanize them.”⁴
- On March 19, the Sontheimer Lab’s manager, Jenny Raines, wrote, “With the coronavirus situation, we are reducing our colony size.”⁵
- On April 1, associate professor Irving Allen wrote, “We are implementing our contingency plans and will be culling animals over the next few days.”⁶
- On April 15, departing VT employee Shiv Kale wrote, “I need to Euthanize [*sic*] the mice first.” (Apparently, he was referring to 17 “cages” of mice.)⁷
- On June 12, Jianmin Su, research assistant professor at Fox Lab, wrote, “We only have 2 pair mice (we shrunk a lot of mouse cages because of Covid19 condition).”⁸

Additionally, in an e-mail exchange, John Pastor, director of communications at the Fralin Biomedical Research Institute, initially proposed that the university deny to the media that any animals had been killed in response to COVID-19, suggesting the following language: “No animals were euthanized at Virginia Tech because of the COVID-19 pandemic.”⁹ VT later revised this false statement to highlight that there was no “mandate” to euthanize animals, without admitting that any animals had been killed—an apparent attempt to mislead a reporter and the public.

²Rife, L. (2020, September 17). PETA seeks investigation, claiming Tech, UVa misused state funds with animal experiments. *The Roanoke Times*. https://roanoke.com/business/local/peta-seeks-investigation-claiming-tech-uva-misused-state-funds-with-animal-experiments/article_55e7af50-928d-547d-941b-60c5856cc7be.html

³Rainville, J. (2020, March 18). E-mail correspondence. Virginia Tech. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Extra-mice.pdf>

⁴Rizzo, A. (2020, March 18). E-mail correspondence. Virginia Tech. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Extra-mice.pdf>

⁵Raines, J. (2020, March 19). E-mail correspondence. Virginia Tech. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Mouse-strain-availability.pdf>

⁶Allen, I. (2020, April 1). E-mail correspondence. Virginia Tech. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Covid-training.pdf>

⁷Kale, S. (2020, April 15). E-mail correspondence. Virginia Tech. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Re-Departure-from-Virginia-Tech.pdf>

⁸Su, J. (2020, June 12). E-mail correspondence. Virginia Tech. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Export.pdf>

⁹Pastor, J. (2020, September 16). E-mail correspondence. Virginia Tech. <https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/RE-peta-comment.pdf>

VT can no longer reasonably claim that its COVID-19 response caused no harm to the animals confined in its laboratories. As the records described above demonstrate, animals were apparently killed, perhaps by the hundreds, with the approval of the school's leadership. It is disingenuous to claim that it is not possible to replace the use of animals in experiments while treating them, in effect, as disposable laboratory equipment instead of the sentient beings they really are.

Furthermore, in light of the recent surge in COVID-19 infections, we renew our request in our letter to you dated April 16 that VT take the following action:

- 1. Prohibit the approval of new animal protocols and experiments**
- 2. Prohibit the breeding and acquisition of new animals for laboratories**
- 3. Finalize and end current animal experiments**
- 4. Prove that all of these animal experiments are concretely advancing human health. If they're not, switch to superior human-relevant, animal-free research methods.¹⁰**

You can contact me at ShalinG@peta.org or 757-962-8325. We look forward to your reply regarding this important matter. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,



Shalin G. Gala
Vice President, International Laboratory Methods
Laboratory Investigations Department

¹⁰People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. (2019). *The Research Modernization Deal*. https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-Research-Modernization-Deal-Report-US_FINAL_2020_300.pdf