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Training for trades personnel

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When training people in the laboratory animal science field, we typically think of researchers, scientists, IACUC personnel and animal care staff members who are directly involved in working with or near research animals. We might not consider people who enter animal facilities but do not work with the animals. I am referring to trades personnel: mechanics, plumbers, carpenters, housekeepers, custodians, painters, security guards and others who address maintenance concerns in animal facilities. Training for trades personnel is an important component of any animal care program. It helps to ensure their safety and the biosecurity of the animal facility.

A cardinal rule when setting up training is to consider the audience. Unlike animal care and research staff members, many trades personnel are unfamiliar with animal facilities. Trainers should be able to answer basic questions and discuss different aspects of an animal facility, such as the numbers and species of animals used and the types of work that may be done.

Trades personnel may also be unaware of the potential risks associated with animal research facilities. Trainers should aim to ensure that trades personnel are alerted to the risks without instilling fear. Trades personnel who aren't made aware of the risks could be exposed to zoonotic disease or animal allergens or could put animals at risk (for example, by exposing them to diseases such as tuberculosis). Ensuring that all personnel have the proper training and health clearance for entering animal facilities can safeguard against such concerns.

On the other hand, trades personnel may also be extremely concerned about potential threats to their health and may become panicked if they are not properly informed about the risks. For example,

during the Ebola virus outbreaks in 2014, I came across several individuals who were afraid that the virus could spread within our facilities. My approach is to calm their fears by informing them that they would be notified if such a danger were present and would be instructed in precautionary and protective measures.

At my institution, routine training includes occupational health risks; personal protective equipment; species-specific zoonotic diseases; reporting of injuries, bites, scratches or splashes; traffic flow patterns; general information on the use of animals in research; security measures; and contact information. I have found that large amounts of scientific information can be overwhelming and sometimes confusing to trades personnel, so I focus on key points and high-risk concerns. Facility access procedures for trades personnel should be established and communicated clearly. Access may require signing in with a manager, obtaining health or security clearance or using a key card.

Policies for training, documenting and retraining (as needed) should be established at the institutional level. This ensures compliance with the expectations of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the IACUC, and the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International.

My institution provides training for trades personnel at least once per year in a lecture format with a slide presentation or detailed informational fact sheet. Online training is also available. Trainees receive a hand-out with facility contact information. In addition, all trades personnel who will be entering areas housing nonhuman primates are provided with an occupational exposure card detailing the first aid procedures associated with exposure to macacine herpesvirus 1. Facility managers or supervisors guide

trades personnel through the appropriate procedures when accessing the animal facility. Like others, trades personnel are documented in the institution's learning management system, too.

We know that different approaches to training can be used to appeal to different learners. I have found that detailed face-to-face presentations regarding occupational risks, which provide one-on-one interaction, are the best option for trades personnel. They can be given an occupational health disclaimer or a general fact sheet about the risks tailored to their needs or a document that they must sign as an indication of their understanding. To personalize the training session, trainers should also provide their contact information. Online training with a quiz addressing risks specific to the facility makes it easy to track training in a database. But trainers should anticipate that some trades personnel might not have access to online training and might therefore need a different method of instruction to ensure compliance and documentation. During a facility orientation or walk-through, trades personnel tour an animal facility with supervisors and managers to learn about traffic flow patterns, gowning areas and signage.

Training is always evolving, and adopting different teaching strategies (such as one-on-one training and web-based modules) can strengthen a trainer's ability to teach many individuals. As a trainer, I strive to provide education in a form that is best suited to each trainee in order to improve his or her comprehension.

As trades personnel join our institutions to maintain our facilities, we must recognize their contributions and remember their safety, the safety of the animal facility and the occupational health risks involved. Education delivers a safe working environment for all types of employees and provides protection for our research animals.

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