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Preparing for natural disaster

Animal facility managers must be equipped to respond to hurricanes and other natural disasters, which can endanger lives and impair research. Staff members should know how to ensure their own safety while continuing to care for the animals on site. Drawing from personal experience at a Florida facility, Thomas presents guidelines for hurricane preparedness, which can be applied to most crisis situations. An effective emergency plan must include a priority system, a well-trained emergency response team, efficient communication methods and concrete provisions for animals and employees. [See page 28](#)

Is bigger really better?

To determine whether cage size affects mouse breeding performance and offspring behavior, Whitaker *et al.* housed breeding trios of mice in standard or large cages and measured the following reproductive parameters: litter size; litter survival to weaning age; average pup weight at 7, 14 and 21 days; and the number of days between litter births. The authors then carried out a series of behavioral assays on a subset of weaned pups born in cages of each size, using tests that have been shown to reflect mouse response to environmental and rearing conditions. Cage size had no significant effect on any of the reproductive parameters measured and few or inconsistent effects on pups' behavior. [See page 32](#)

The best house for your mouse

Though many researchers agree that present standards for mouse cage density are somewhat arbitrary, studies aimed at producing science-based housing recommendations seem to cloud the issue even further. A panel at the 2006 National Meeting of the American Association of Laboratory Animal Science discussed mouse housing in depth, examining the complex factors that influence decision-making. Foltz and colleagues present a summary of the panel discussion, which encompassed regulatory requirements, scientific research and its interpretation, financial considerations and ethical concerns. Speakers emphasized that animal welfare should take precedence over considerations such as space restriction, convenience and cost. [See page 40](#)