

Commitment to responsible animal testing in research and education at Austrian universities and non-university research institutions

We, the signatories of this declaration, are committed to responsible animal testing at the institutions we represent.¹

Why is animal testing necessary in research and education?

Animal testing, as one approach among the methods used in biomedicine, research, and education, is irreplaceable in many fields. It is the responsibility of science and research to create the foundations for the best possible medical care of humans and animals and to continue to develop them. This includes the development of new therapeutic approaches, the further development of existing therapies, as well as research into as-yet-unknown causes of disease and systemic interactions. Before the use of a new therapy or a new drug on patients is ethically justifiable, tests must be conducted in accordance with legal regulations to determine if the use of this therapy or drug is both safe and effective. Research and medicine with their wide range of methods² form an inseparable whole.

Animal testing enables us to show complex interactions in an organism which often cannot be reliably simulated at this time using alternative methods. The findings from basic research provide the basis for advances in the application of human and veterinary medicine. Animal testing is a crucial step in the process from the original observation or idea to a usable result. Animal testing also plays a very important role in education and training.

Ethical challenge & legislation

In Austria, the practice of animal testing is strictly regulated. There are laws on who may conduct animal testing and for what purpose, how the animals are to be bred and kept, and what statistics must be gathered. For each animal test, an official permit is required, as well as the relevant expertise, which is ensured by a high level of training among all those involved. At the universities, compliance with the legislation and the regulatory requirements is monitored once a year by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (see <http://www.bmbwf.gv.at/forschung/national/forschungsrecht/tierversuche>).

We are aware of our responsibility to the animals and society, particularly the patients and the staff who work with the animals. Animal testing presents an ethical challenge to our society. As such, we only conduct animal testing after careful ethical consideration. The legally prescribed animal-welfare bodies thus serve as an internal control mechanism.

Promoting the 3 R's principle

We are fully committed to the 3 R's principle (replace, reduce, and refine) and the responsible practice of animal testing. This is characterised by respectful treatment of the

¹ The content of this document was prepared as part of a workshop in Vienna on 23 April 2018, at which representatives of Austrian universities, extra-university research institutions, and the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) took part.

² Including cell cultures, computer models, animal tests, and, in the final step, clinical studies involving humans;

animals, with the minimum degree of pain, suffering, distress, and lasting harm. We comply with current animal welfare standards, and only qualified staff care for the animals and conduct animal testing. To ensure this quality, we support the establishment of a new, Austrian-wide standardised training according to internationally recognised criteria. The training should be offered at several research institutions rather than at one central location.

Animal tests are only carried out when there is no alternative. Therefore, a check is done before each test whether complementary and alternative methods could be used to reduce the number of animal tests and minimise the distress to the animals. It is a particular responsibility of research to guarantee the maximum possible significance of research projects. This means that the number of animal tests must be as low as possible, while still being high enough to obtain significant research results.

Informing the general public

Animal testing is a topic of particular public interest. We see it as our responsibility to make the public aware of the monitoring processes we have established and their results. We are committed to open communication about animal testing. We will continue to contribute to the fair and balanced reporting on this ethically complex issue.

Signatory institutions

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Klement TOCKNER
President of the Austrian Science Fund (FWF)

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Hellmut SAMONIGG
Rector of the Medical University of Graz

Univ.-Prof. Dr. W. Wolfgang FLEISCHHACKER
Rector of the Medical University of Innsbruck

Univ.-Prof. Dr. med. univ. Markus MÜLLER
Rector of the Medical University of Vienna

Ao. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Petra Winter, Dipl. ECBHM
Rector of the University of Veterinarian Medicine, Vienna

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Christa NEUPER
Rector of the University of Graz

Univ.-Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Dr. Hubert HASENAUER
Rector of the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. mult Tilmann MÄRK
Rector of the Leopold Franzens University of Innsbruck

Univ.-Prof. DI Dr. Wolfgang PRIBYL, MBA
Chief Executive Officer of JOANNEUM RESEARCH Forschungsgesellschaft mbH,
Graz

Prof. Thomas A. HENZINGER
President of the Institute of Science and Technology Austria (IST Austria)