

UK animal experiments at 22 year high, back to late 1980s levels. Science needs a 'roadmap to replacement' says Dr Hadwen Trust for Humane Research



Home Office statistics released today (21 July 2009) reveal that Britain's animal experiments have reached a shocking high at **3.7 million experiments**, a 14% rise since 2007 and the highest for at least 22 years. The Dr Hadwen Trust for Humane Research, the UK's leading non-animal medical research charity, today reacted by saying that far greater progress to replace animals with alternatives should have been made but instead animal numbers are now as high as they were in the late 1980s.

On this the 50th anniversary of the birth of the 3Rs (Russell and Burch's concept of the replacement, reduction and refinement of animal experiments), the Dr Hadwen Trust says this is 'a wake-up call moment for policy makers' and has written to the major political parties calling on them to commit to building a 'roadmap to replacement'. A roadmap is needed to identify key target areas for increased funding, technology development, R&D and political support in order to progressively reduce and ultimately replace animal experiments.

Statistics overview

- **39% increase in animal experiments since Labour came to power in 1997**
- **14% rise in animal experiments since 2007**
- **3.656 million animal experiments started in 2008**
- **3.583 million animals used in 2008**
- **16% rise in experiments on GM animals since 2007**
- **Genetic modification of animals now represents 36.5% of all procedures**
- **16% rise in monkey experiments since 2007 (61% increase in monkeys used for cardiovascular experiments; 34% rise in nervous system research)**
- **17% rise in cat experiments**
- **9% rise in mice experiments**
- **82% rise in experiments on amphibians and reptiles**

- **85% rise in experiments on fish**
- **95% rise in pig experiments (mainly immunology)**
- **65% of procedures conducted without any form of anaesthesia**
- **Decreases in use of dogs (18%), rabbits (13%)**

Dr Sebastien Farnaud, Science Director at the Dr Hadwen Trust for Humane Research and a molecular biologist at Westminster University, believes far greater progress to replace animals should have been made:

“This year is the fifty-year anniversary of the very concept of replacing, reducing and refining animal experiments and yet instead of an alternatives revolution we are marking the occasion with the highest level of animal experiments in seventeen years.” says Dr Farnaud. *“It has repeatedly been shown how irrelevant to human patients animal disease models can be, so sustaining such high animal use is not in the best interests of science. With the scientific expertise this country has to offer, we should have seen far greater progress to replace animals with more advanced techniques. Instead animal numbers are now as bad as they were in the late 1980s. Such a shocking increase in animal experiments should be a wake-up call moment for policy makers that considerably more effort must be focused on alternatives development in biomedical science not simply to avoid animal suffering, but crucially so that medical research can benefit from the advantages that non-animal approaches can bring.”*

The Dr Hadwen Trust for Humane Research funds cutting-edge research at universities across Britain. Our projects aim to replace the use of animals in medical research and by so doing, improve the relevance and quality of research into debilitating conditions such as multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, skin cancer and brain disorders. For example, in March a Dr Hadwen Trust-funded three-dimensional human cell model of early breast cancer won the NC3Rs’ animal replacement prize. The model offers a more human-relevant approach and replaces experiments that can use up to 400 mice per test in tumour studies.

Notes

Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals – Great Britain, 2008, released in a summary, on the Home Office website on 21 July 2009. The complete document is available [here](#).

Total animal procedures started in 2008 (3.656 million) is the highest since 1987 (3.631 million). Prior to 1988 annual statistics were calculated differently.

In 1959 zoologist William Russell and microbiologist Rex Burch published [The principles of humane experimental technique](#) which first launched the concept of the ‘Three Rs’ of replacement, reduction and refinement. The Three Rs concept has now been adopted throughout the world as the key guiding principle in the humane use of animals in research, and is incorporated into the legislation and regulations of many countries including the UK, and the European Union.

