

# “A dialogue is useful”

## Putting the animal first: private lecturer Dr. Bettina Bert on the legal changes governing the approval of experiments.

### **Ms. Bert, since mid-2021, we have more stringent regulations concerning animal experiments. What is this all about?**

Even before the amendment to the Animal Welfare Act and the Regulation for the Protection of Animals Used for Experimental and Other Scientific Purposes, strict rules applied. Nevertheless, changes were necessary because the EU demanded improvements in the implementation of the Directive on the Protection of Laboratory Animals. This addresses the fact that animal welfare legislation in Germany has to be implemented in compliance with the Directive, and not only interpreted.

### **Does that mean the EU Directive was not fully adhered to until now?**

In principle, the EU Directive allows some leeway in terms of how the legal regulations are implemented in national legislation. Each Member State takes this leeway to adapt the regulations to existing legislation. From the EU Commission’s perspective, further amendment was needed because the implementation was not always in line with the Directive.

### **Does this mean more bureaucracy, or real progress?**

Certain things have been improved and clarified, such as legal uncertainties. For example, I think it is positive that scientists who carry out animal experiments have to check whether the methods they use can be improved in terms of animal welfare. The same applies to housing conditions. This was already mentioned in the previous Animal Welfare Act but has been made more explicit now, and will hopefully help to improve animal welfare. Inspections on animal experiments are more clearly regulated and the notification procedure has been replaced by a simplified approval procedure. Such changes always entail initial uncertainty regarding how everything is put into practice. A certain amount of bureaucracy is unfortunately unavoidable.

### **Animal testing facilities will be subject to stricter inspections in the future. Is the mistrust justified?**

While the media might paint a different picture, I believe that infringements are the exception. It is good that the procedure for inspections has been clarified. These will now be carried out following a risk analysis, and without advance notice. I believe a dialogue between the licensing authority and the scientific institution is useful. It should go beyond mere controls, and help to improve living conditions of animals.



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In this interview: **Dr. Bettina Bert** is responsible for animal welfare and knowledge transfer at the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR).

### **The BfR operates the [www.AnimalTestInfo.de](http://www.AnimalTestInfo.de) data-base, which provides easily understandable information about approved upcoming animal experimentation projects in Germany. There is now a database like this at the EU level (ALURES). Does that mean the German database is dispensable?**

Certainly not. ‘AnimalTestInfo’ is well-established and is very user-friendly. Even though we naturally forward our data to the EU, it is good to continue to keep this information available for the public.

### **What new tasks will the German Centre for the Protection of Laboratory Animals at the BfR have to deal with?**

The German Federal States now report the data on laboratory animals that have been used directly to the BfR. These data are then incorporated into the laboratory animal statistics that are published annually. This information was previously sent to the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture. The BfR checks the data and forwards them to the Commission’s ALURES database. ■

#### **More information:**

[www.animaltestinfo.de](http://www.animaltestinfo.de) (in German)  
[https://ec.europa.eu/environment/index\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/index_en) > Chemicals  
 > Protection of laboratory animals > ALURES