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SAFN facilities management during COVID-19 lockdown

Members of the SAFN did their utmost to maintain the safety and welfare of the facilities staff and research animals during the challenging lockdown time.

The necessary measures adopted by the authorities to react to the spread of the coronavirus led to massive reduction of research activities between March and May 2020. This had a large impact on the animal facilities. While access was restricted for researchers, all SAFN facilities continued their necessary operations to assure animal welfare. swissuniversities observed that, during this period, the following measures had been put in place in SAFN facilities to ensure protection of the staff and animal welfare, as well as to maintain essential core activities:

- Stop of importation of new animals, unless related to research on SARS-CoV-2
- Reduction of breeding to the indispensable minimum
- No initiation of new projects involving animals, unless related to research on SARS-CoV-2
- Maintenance of selected ongoing experiments

Decisions on specific requests were made on a case-by-case basis, considering different parameters including staff requirement, timing, complexity and comprehensive harm/benefit assessment. The overall strategy was mindful of allowing activities to pick up as swiftly as possible at the end of the COVID-19 lockdown.

Regular exchanges between the SAFN, the Swiss Animal Welfare Officers Network (AWO-N) as well as the animal experimentation division of the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office additionally helped to identify and implement coordinated measures in the facilities of the Swiss universities during this lockdown period.

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