IBC Policy for Service/Assistance Animals in Teaching and Research Laboratories

The main role of the MSU Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) is to protect students, teachers, researchers, and community from potential exposure to the biological agents studied in MSU research and teaching laboratories. This mission depends on the execution of safe bioagent handling and containment, as prescribed by federal regulations and MSU biosafety policies and procedures. In addition, access to laboratories must sometimes be restricted in cases where particularly dangerous, opportunistic, or pathogenic bioagents are present. These cases require special consideration by the IBC, to ensure that MSU does everything in its power to accommodate the unique needs of individuals who rely on service/assistance animals.

In this policy, “individual” refers to students, researchers, and all other persons who may enter a research or teaching laboratory for the purposes of learning and performing experiments.

This policy does not apply to the Animal Resources Center (ARC).

Service/Assistance Animals

A “service animal” is a dog, miniature horse, or other species that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability. On the MSU campus, there are also emotional support and other “assistance animals,” which are often registered with the MSU Office of Disability Services so that they are authorized to accompany individuals to MSU classes. For individuals who wish to bring their service/assistance animals into laboratories, Disability Services will serve as a liaison between the individual and the lab manager or other appropriate MSU employee, to engage in the process of determining whether and under what conditions an animal may be allowed in a specific laboratory. If an individual has not obtained prior approval from Disability Services, the animal may still be permitted, if it is deemed reasonable under the circumstances. MSU employees are encouraged to reach out to Disability Services and the Biosafety Officer for assistance in determining whether an animal which has not received prior approval may be allowed in a lab.

Biosafety Containment Level 1 (BSL1) Research and Teaching Laboratories

Laboratories are categorized according to the relative risks associated with the bioagents under study. BSL1 containment laboratories are designed for the investigation of bioagents that pose a minimal potential threat to people or environment and are generally not associated with human disease. In the case of a BSL1 research or teaching laboratory, a service/assistance animal may accompany an individual on condition that lab safety and activities are not compromised or interfered with in any way. Consultation with Disability Services, the MSU employee in charge, and the Biosafety Officer will ensure that appropriate accommodations are made in advance.
**Biosafety Containment Level 2 (BSL2) Research and Teaching Laboratories**

BSL2 containment laboratories are designed for work on bioagents of moderate disease threat to healthy humans. MSU does not allow animals in BSL2 containment facilities because of federal regulations; the key biosafety regulatory guide, the CDC’s *Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories* (Centers for Disease Control, BMBL), states that “Animals and plants not associated with the work being performed must not be permitted in the laboratory.” However, alternative solutions may be worked out in advance with the approval of the appropriate MSU employee in charge of the laboratory (laboratory manager, professor or principal investigator), so that individuals with service/assistance animals can be accommodated in some workable fashion.

The MSU Office of Disability Services, the IBC, MSU laboratory managers, and the Biosafety Officer will work together to accommodate individuals with service/assistance animals in our teaching and research programs as best we can. For questions, please contact the [MSU Office of Disability Services](mailto:) and MSU Biosafety Officer Phil J. Merta (994-3779 [philip.merta@montana.edu](mailto:)).