



PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

April 21, 2020

Paul W. Barras, DVM
President and CEO
Primate Products, Inc.
PO Box 1588, Immokalee, FL 34143

Via e-mail: info@primateproducts.com; sales@primateproducts.com

Dear Dr. Barras,

I am writing on behalf of our 6.5 million members and supporters to ask you to take immediate action to protect the health of thousands of monkeys and ensure that research integrity is maintained at your facility in Hendry County, Florida. Primate Products Inc. describes itself as a CDC contract quarantine facility as well as a long-term holding and primate breeding colony. Your clients include the federally-funded National Primate Research Centers (NPRCs) and National Institutes of Health contract facilities. You state on your website that you provide pre-delivery health screening of the monkeys in your facility. In a [media report](#) last month, directors of three of the country's seven NPRCs stated that *their* primate colonies were being closely monitored for COVID-19, though they acknowledged the risk of accidental exposures from infected humans. We at PETA did not find their observations comforting and we have even less confidence in your ability to protect your colony in Hendry County:

“Keeping the virus out of primate colonies across the country will be essential for SARS-CoV-2 research, [Jeffrey] Roberts and other center officials say. Once an animal has been infected, it can't be used for research, so any colony outbreak would severely limit the number of animals available for COVID-19 experiments.”

“If we wanted to test the efficacy of a vaccine and the animals have already been exposed [to the virus] and gotten over [an infection], you can't infect them, so you couldn't tell whether the vaccine's protective,” [Skip] Bohm says. “You couldn't do drug treatment studies to see if you could cure the disease because you couldn't infect [the animals].”

Dr. Thompson-Iritani is quoted in the article saying “...[T]he animals at the Washington site are fairly well protected from accidentally

Washington, D.C.
1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

Norfolk
501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

Berkeley
2855 Telegraph Ave.
Ste. 301
Berkeley, CA 94705
510-763-PETA

Info@peta.org
PETA.org

Affiliates:

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

contracting SARS-CoV-2 from humans...”.[March 19, 2020 The Scientist](#)

Statements such as those given by NPRC directors about the consequences of unintentional infections are alarming. Colonies that are at best “fairly well protected” during a pandemic undermine the very reason that primate experimenters claim to need to cage and maintain 100,000-plus primates in laboratories.

In 2015 [complaints to the Occupational Health and Safety Administration \(OSHA\), Fort Lauderdale Area Office](#), by PPI employees cited insufficient use and application of personal protective equipment when working with animals carrying pathogenic organisms, lack of adequate training provided to employees to prevent transmission of diseases from animals, and misapplication of cleaning and disinfection standard operating procedures. COVID-19 has infected humans across our country, including individuals in Hendry County. Many infections have been asymptomatic, thereby increasing the likelihood that staff may have already exposed your colony. Animal care and husbandry staff frequently report that they are overworked and marginalized at primate facilities. There is every expectation that technicians and husbandry staff are coming to work everyday (PPI intentionally chose to locate its facilities in Hendry County because of the [“agricultural mindset of the labor base”](#)) to care for the animals. Shortages in PPE are impacting primate research facilities around the country and SOPs designed to prevent the spread of infections are now likely even more compromised. And like all other primate facilities around the country, PPI is not fully staffed, as indicated by the posted vacancies for husbandry care technicians.

As you likely know, animal “models” overwhelmingly fail to lead to treatments for humans. The NIH reports that 95 percent of new medications that test safe and effective in animals fail in clinical trials.¹ It’s also been shown that 90 percent of basic research, most of which involves animals, fails to lead to human therapies,² and as many as 89 percent of preclinical studies, many of which involve animals, could not be reproduced,³ a fundamental step used to confirm the validity of scientific results.

Monkeys who may or may not be harboring various viruses, including COVID-19, will not yield reliable data. We respectfully request that you immediately provide PETA and the public with the following information:

¹ National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences. Transforming Translational Science. <https://ncats.nih.gov/files/NCATS-factsheet.pdf>. Published Winter 2019. Accessed March 24, 2020.

² Contopoulos-Ioannidis DG, Ntzani EE, Ioannidis JPA. Translation of highly promising basic science research into clinical applications. *The American Journal of Medicine*. 2003;114:477-84.

³ Freedman LP, Cockburn IM, Simcoe TS. The economics of reproducibility in preclinical research. *PLoS Biology*. 2015;13(6):e1002165.

- a. Documentation that none of your staff have been exposed to or infected with COVID-19
- b. Documentation that none of the primates in your facility have been exposed to or infected with COVID-19
- c. Documentation that simply limiting staff exposure to primates will protect the animals from exposure to COVID-19.
- d. Documentation that you have screened every primate that has been shipped out of your facility within the last month for exposure to or infection with COVID-19

PETA scientists and veterinarians advise both government agencies and private corporations on issues involving research using animals in laboratories. We would be happy to meet with you, on short notice, on this issue. May we hear from you?

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kathy Guillermo
Senior Vice President
Laboratory Investigations

Ingrid Taylor, DVM
Research Associate
Laboratory Investigations