

13 primates die at South Texas research facility

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A South Texas research facility where 13 primates died of hyperthermia in overheated rooms could face federal penalties, a U.S. Department of Agriculture spokeswoman said Monday.

A federal inspector found that two animals died in September when a thermostat malfunctioned at Covance Research Products in Alice, causing the [room temperature](#) to soar. A similar incident occurred about a month later when a thermostat override switch failed, causing the deaths of 11 primates.

Covance, which is headquartered in Princeton, New Jersey, provides animal testing to aid in the development of drugs for an array of ailments, from heart disease to diabetes, said Covance spokeswoman Melissa Thompson.

The company notified USDA after the second incident, and corrective steps were taken that included plans to install temperature alarms in all animal housing rooms, according to a Nov. 21 federal inspector's report.

USDA is now considering what actions it should take, spokeswoman Tanya Espinosa said Monday.

Espinosa did not know how hot the rooms became, but the inspector's report notes rooms housing primates cannot rise about 85 degrees for more than four consecutive hours.

Thompson said the primates that died were cynomolgus monkeys, a type of macaque that is often used in medical research.

Covance said in a statement that the facility will be manually monitored until it adds electronic temperature monitoring and alerts.

"Covance takes very seriously our ethical and regulatory responsibilities to treat research animals with the utmost care and respect," the company said.

Michael Budkie, executive director of Ohio-based Stop Animal Exploitation Now, said he's filed a complaint with USDA seeking a fine of more than \$100,000 against Covance.

"The negligence which allowed primates to literally be cooked to death on two separate incidents deserves the maximum penalty," Budkie said. "These monkeys suffered horribly, dying unnecessarily, and this facility should pay the price."

Espinosa said USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service must review Covance's compliance history before determining whether to penalize the company. Enforcement action could include a letter of warning, a fine or forwarding the matter to a court that could suspend or revoke the facility's operating license.

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