BACKGROUND

Sometimes procedures that result in temporary distress and even some pain are necessary to sustain the long-term welfare of animals or their handlers. These practices include (but are not limited to) tail docking of sheep and swine. Tail-docking of lambs is performed to reduce the possibility of soiling the long tail with urine and feces and the subsequent development of fly strike, a potentially fatal condition. In swine, tails may be docked to reduce the potential for tail-biting.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE

There are several acceptable methods for tail-docking. These include rubber rings, hot-iron cautery, surgical removal, surgical removal after application of an emasculator, and various combinations of the basic procedures.

Tails should be docked within 7 days of birth for lambs and 6 days of birth for pigs with analgesics following the Peckham Farm Tail Docking Protocol. On the day of the procedure, the animals must be determined to be in overall good health and suckling normally and be on a positive state of weight gain and growth. Any sick, weak, or otherwise compromised animals must have the procedure delayed and may be docked surgically later, if necessary. For lambs, very short tail docking is not permitted because it increases the incidence of rectal, and perhaps vaginal, prolapses.

Tail docking should be categorized on IACUC protocols as United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Pain Category “D” for sheep and Category “C” for swine.

REFERENCES