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Meeting to discuss distress

Finding ways to minimize pain and distress in research animals is a continuing goal in the laboratory animal research field. Pain and distress, however, are not synonymous, and measures that alleviate one may not affect the other. A meeting held in February 2004 focused on distress in laboratory animals. In this issue, the participants provide a summary of the proceedings of that meeting. They discuss the difficulties associated with defining 'distress,' propose methods to aid in recognizing and alleviating distressful conditions, and provide recommendations for animal research conduct and oversight that would minimize distress experienced by laboratory animals. [See page 26](#)

Controlling PCR-based screening of biological samples

PCR-based testing for infectious agents in mouse cell lines and tissues has recently been developed as an alternative to the traditional Mouse Antibody Production test. One drawback to currently available PCR-based assays is the lack of appropriate positive controls for PCR detection of the infectious agents. When negative samples are the norm and positive controls are absent, it is very difficult to feel confident detecting infectious agents. To alleviate this problem, Ayril and colleagues developed a panel of primers and positive-control DNA plasmids that enable rapid testing of biological samples, such as cell lines, tissues, or animal sera, for presence of the infectious agents most damaging to mouse colonies. [See page 31](#)

Insights into vole reproduction

The Yangtze field vole (*Microtus fortis calamorum*) is naturally resistant to infection by the parasite that causes schistosomiasis, making it an appropriate model for studying disease pathogenesis. Although several groups are using this animal in laboratory investigations, relatively little is known about the species's reproductive physiology. Liu *et al.* examined the vole's *in vivo* and *in vitro* embryonic development as well as the efficacy of *in vitro* fertilization using either fresh or cryopreserved sperm to breed these rodents. [See page 37](#)

