

Allegations of Animal Cruelty Facing USM

HATTIESBURG – According to [a report on](#) 10-Dec-2012 by Ed Kemp for *The Hattiesburg American*, the animal rights group known as Stop Animal Exploitation Now!, or SAEN, has filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Agriculture alleging negligent treatment of animals by researchers at USM. As Kemp reports, SAEN executive director Michael Budkie has reported to the USDoA that Southern Miss researchers “have exhibited a continuing multi-month pattern of disregard for the well-being of . . . animals, there (sic) suffering and debilitation.”



The THA story notes that Budkie learned of the negligence at USM from a Sept-2012 USDoA report on tick research at USM. Budkie expanded on the comments above about the allegations during an interview with Kemp, stating, “It’s not a pretty picture . . . [it is] some of the worst animal suffering that I have ever had the displeasure to read about.” As Kemp indicates,

“ . . . the report noted prolonged tick-feeding of a rabbit that caused large holes in the rabbit’s ears, as well as ear discoloration and rectal bleeding. There were also examples of rabbits and hamsters suffering anorexia and weight loss. In one case, a visiting high school student was allowed to assist in the tick harvesting of a rabbit, despite the fact that the ticks carried a pathogen deemed moderately hazardous. In many of these instances, the research facility violated its own protocols by either having too many ticks on the animals or by allowing the feeding to go for too long.”

USM’s response to the allegations of negligence toward animals during tick research at USM that was funded by the National Institutes of Health was put forth by Gordon Cannon, USM’s vice provost for research. In an interview with *THA*’s Kemp, Gordon stated that “[USM’s tick] research is well-respected in the scientific community and important in determining the transmission of disease by ticks. We regret that the agreed-upon protocols were not followed exactly as outlined.” USDoA spokesman David Sacks told Kemp that the USDoA will review the evidence and determine if a full investigation (of USM) into violations of *The Animal Welfare Act* should occur. As Kemp concludes, the maximum penalty (from the USDoA) per infraction is \$10,000.

Long-time readers of USMNEWS.net will recall that Cannon has been [a major player](#) in what has been referred to as “downward mobbing” at USM. In fact, the photo of Cannon below dated 16-Apr-2010 was taken during a legal deposition concerning a mobbing episode against a USM faculty member. A plethora of reports about Cannon can be found using the USMNEWS.net custom Google search bar (see the main page).



This particular issue arises at about the same time as a recent USMNEWS.net report showing that funded research at USM [has been dropping](#) at an alarming rate. With funding agencies such as the USDoA and NIH now hearing that USM’s research practices may be in violation of federal law, future funding support for research at USM may now face further scrutiny and, thus, be more difficult to obtain.

Finally, USMNEWS.net sources remind us that federal inspection of activities at USM appears to be a growing trend. A [recent report indicated that](#) the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s FEMA division has alleged that USM misused \$5.3 million in Hurricane Katrina aid. In that situation, USM-GC vice president Frances Lucas admitted that \$1.44 million of the \$5.3 million in FEMA aid should be returned to FEMA by USM, and that the remaining \$3.85 million flagged by the DoHS’s Inspector General was, with emphasis added, “*mostly* spent properly.” Sources indicate that Lucas’ logic is quite consistent with Cannon’s (see above), when he states that federal research protocols were not followed “*exactly* as outlined.” These are two high-ranking officials, and in one case a daughter, in the administration of Aubrey Lucas, the interim USM president [who told the USM faculty senate](#) just a few months ago that it was his understanding that the *USM Faculty Handbook* did **not** apply to USM administrators. It appears from recent reports on this and other issues that USM officials feel the same way about federal guidelines and regulations.