

Naturewatch

PRESS RELEASE: For immediate release

EXPERIMENTS HIT 3.5 MILLION AS MPs DEMAND MEASURES TO PROMOTE NON-ANIMAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

249 MPs have signed an Early Day Motion urging the government to do more to promote non-animal research methods, making it the fifth most highly supported EDM in the 2009 parliamentary session (out of a total of 2,090 EDMs). Over the past month MPs have clambered to sign EDM 545 ahead of the release of Home Office Statistics for animal experiments in 2008.

The Home Office statistics released today, confirm that for the seventh successive year the number of animals used in experiments has increased, and now tops over 3.5 million animals. This means, almost 1 million more animals were used in 2008, than in 2001. These shocking figures come amidst calls for more to be done to support and promote non-animal alternatives.

Naturewatch Campaign Manager Dawn Lewis said "we are totally dismayed by the continued increase in animal experiments, despite the groundswell of support for humane scientific research. Through Early Day Motion 545, Parliament has demonstrated solid support for humane scientific research. This sends a clear message to government to take immediate and positive steps to promote non-animal alternatives and reduce the number of animals in experiments."

Early Day Motion 545 tabled by MP Martin Horwood, (Lib Dem, Cheltenham) on behalf of campaigning organisation Naturewatch, highlights the steady rise in animals used in experiments over the past 10 years, while urging government to do more to promote the pioneering work that is being done in the UK to develop hi-tech methods of research that replace the use of animals. These methods include tissue engineering, bio-chips, microdosing and computer models that mimic virtual human beings.

Remarking on the support that EDM 545 has received, Martin Horwood MP said 'I am absolutely delighted by the response from right across the House of Commons, including 125 Labour MPs, 53 Conservatives and 53 Lib Dems – nearly all of the parliamentary Liberal Democrat party. I think this demonstrates a real mood for change and for much more active promotion of alternatives to animal research'.

Dawn Lewis, Campaign Manager for Naturewatch "Given sufficient funding and support, humane scientific research is the way forward. Non-animal alternatives are becoming a reality, producing scientific data that is more relevant to humans and more humane."

Cell biologist Dr Kelly BéruBé, whose work in the fields of nanotechnology and tissue engineering have led to a 3D model of lung tissue, that is being used to test the toxicity of inhaled particles such as pollutants and pharmaceuticals, noted – "These models have the ability to be far more accurate. I sometimes think it is just tradition — that feeling that if it's safe in an animal it's safe in a human — which means so many animal tests are still carried out. By recreating tissue environments, we will improve understanding of many aspects of cell behaviour including wound healing and responses to therapeutic drugs without the use of animal models."

The EDM has received the backing of high profile figures such as ex Home Secretary Jacqui Smith, Vincent Cable, Menzies Campbell, Charles Kennedy, Oliver Letwin and Anne Widdecombe.

ENDS

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For further information contact:

Dawn Lewis

Naturewatch

Email dawn@naturewatch.org

tel: 01242 252871

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Home Office statistics for animal experiments, confirm that in 2008 over 3.5 million animals were used in scientific procedures.
2. The number of experiments using non-human primates rose by over 600 (+16%). Source: Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals 2008 (Office for National Statistics, 2009)
3. For the full list of MPs backing Early Day Motion 545, please visit:
<http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=37572&SESSION=899>