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## Oxford Cagey About New Animal Labs

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**LONDON**--When scientists move into new laboratory buildings, their universities often proclaim the event with a ribbon cutting and champagne. Yet when the first mice arrived at the University of Oxford's new animal research facility last week, officials waited to make the announcement until a press conference here today. Rather than enthusiastically providing details about the building's inhabitants--animals and researchers included--Oxford officials spent much of the media encounter declining to answer questions and asking that names of those involved with the building not be used.

The tight-lipped opening reflects the tense atmosphere in the United Kingdom, particularly in Oxford, over animal experimentation. The University of Cambridge abandoned plans for a primate research center in January 2004, citing security threats ([Science](#), 30 January 2004, p. 605).

Animal-rights activists then turned their attention to Oxford to protest construction of its Biomedical Sciences Building. In July 2004, construction contractors pulled out of the project following harassment and arson ([Science](#), 23 July 2004, p. 463; [Science](#), 5 August 2005, p. 872). Oxford obtained a temporary court injunction banning protesters from harassing certain individuals or building contractors, but the project was delayed by nearly 2 years. University officials have yet to release the final cost, which was initially estimated at £18 million. The current injunction permits weekly protests but otherwise excludes identified protesters from approaching the building.

The new facility will consolidate roughly 130 ongoing animal research projects, currently scattered around Oxford, when the move-in is complete in mid-2009. About 98% of the animals housed there will be rodents; ferrets, frogs, and fish account for about 1.5%. The remainder are primates for research, such as neurological studies requiring animal models of human brain disease. The new facility will make life easier for veterinary staff, who must currently roam from building to building. Now they will have a dedicated diagnostic laboratory and training facility on site. The proximity of veterinary staff and improved ventilation systems should improve animal welfare and produce more consistent experimental results, according to Sarah Wolfensohn, Oxford's head of Veterinary Services.

At the press conference, the university released statements from 10 researchers who would be using the new building. All stressed the need for animal experimentation, but only half revealed their identities due to security concerns. Many researchers' statements praised the uniform health care and more versatile housing units available to the animals in the new building. Additional social space for primates "enables social groups to be more stable," making behavioral results more robust, wrote Oxford neuroscientist David Gaffan.

Some researchers originally opposed the plan for a centralized animal facility, citing the safety of doing their research in the relative anonymity of their own departmental buildings, said one senior university official at the press conference who did not want to be identified for security reasons. The university would not elaborate on the security measures taken at the new facility, but a BBC camera crew that had access reported that construction boards topped with barbed wire surround the lab.

Coincidentally, Oxford's press conference came just days after a U.K. court found animal-rights activist Mel Broughton not guilty of possessing an explosive substance with intent to damage the facility. The same jury failed to reach a verdict on two other vandalism-related charges. Broughton was accused of being behind numerous attacks protesting the building in Oxford. He is still in custody, pending appeal and a retrial.

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