



Media Release

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Halt monkey farm construction to protect health and environment, international coalition urged Puerto Rico Governor

Bioculture's primate breeding facility in Guayama could expose island to environmental devastation through monkey escapes and air and water pollution

A proposed primate-breeding facility in the Puerto Rican city of Guayama could endanger public health and pose serious risks to the island's environment, according to an international coalition of nonprofit health and animal protection organisations.

On 22 July, representatives of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) and the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection (BUAV) will join the Puerto Rico Bar Association for a news conference in San Juan. The three organisations are calling on Gov. Luis Fortuño to halt the construction of Bioculture's monkey farm in Guayama. Bioculture is a Mauritius-based primate supply company that ships long-tailed macaque monkeys, including those torn from the wild, around the world for use in product testing and experiments.

At the news conference, a PCRM physician and a BUAV veterinarian will explain that monkeys are likely to escape from Bioculture's Guayama facility. Such escapes could result in the establishment of another destructive invasive species in Puerto Rico, adding to the serious problems already caused by patas monkeys and rhesus monkeys who also invaded the island by escaping from a laboratory.

The facility may also emit air and water pollution. Primate facilities often use incinerators to dispose of waste and dead animals. These incinerators release ashes and soot from animal carcasses, along with chemicals that can cause cancer and damage human embryos.

"As a physician, I think the concerns expressed by Guayama residents about the Bioculture facility are well founded," says Hope Ferdowsian, M.D., M.P.H., PCRM's director of research policy and a public health expert. "A monkey-breeding facility like this one could pose serious health risks to Guayama and the surrounding region."

Bioculture has claimed that the probability of a monkey escaping from the new facility is zero, but a BUAV veterinarian will counter the claim and provide examples of recent monkey escapes at facilities considered to be highly secure.

"The authorities and people of Puerto Rico are being misled about the potential dangers of setting up a monkey-breeding facility," says Nedim C. Buyukmihci, V.M.D., BUAV's veterinary primate consultant and emeritus professor of veterinary medicine at the University of California, Davis. "The reality is that escapes are bound to occur. If long-tailed macaque colonies get established in Puerto Rico, it will be devastating to the human population, through crop damage especially, and to indigenous wildlife."

The experts will also explain their concern that breeding primates for experimentation will not advance medical research. Recent reports in the Journal of the American Medical Association and the British Medical Journal have criticized the usefulness of primate experiments, noting that they consistently fail to predict the safety and effectiveness of drugs in humans.

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For further information or an interview with Dr. Ferdowsian, Dr. Buyukmihci, or another expert, contact Sarah Kite at sarah.kite@buav.org or Patrick Sullivan at 510-834-8680 or psullivan@pcrm.org.

Notes:

Founded in 1985, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine is a nonprofit organization that promotes preventive medicine, conducts clinical research, and encourages higher standards for ethics and effectiveness in research. www.PCRM.org.

The British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection is a nonprofit organization that has been campaigning for over 100 years to achieve a world where nobody wants or believes we need to experiment on animals. It is committed to achieving its aims through reliable and reasoned evidence-based debate. <http://www.buav.org>.