



Media Release

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International acceptance of alternatives to cruel rabbit Draize eye test finally achieved

The **BUAV** has today welcomed the publication of the OECD's final guidance on how to conduct eye irritation tests without using live rabbits. If properly implemented, this move will prevent the untold suffering of thousands of rabbits throughout the world who would otherwise be forcibly restrained while potentially irritating chemicals and cosmetics were dripped into their eyes.

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperative Development) is an economic alliance of 30 of the world's industrialised countries. Based in Paris, the OECD co-ordinates the development of standardised chemical testing guidelines which are then adopted by the member countries.

The BCOP (bovine corneal opacity and permeability) test and the ICE (isolated chicken eye) test are tests that use eyes from animals killed for food via slaughter houses. The BCOP test was developed in the 1940s, pioneered by alternatives experts in the 1970s and finally validated by the European Centre for Alternative Methods in 2007. It is shocking that it has taken this long for international acceptance.

The inclusion of the methods in the OECD guidance means that across the world these methods will often be used instead of rabbits to test whether chemicals and cosmetics will be irritating to the eyes. The rabbit Draize test was a cruel test that meant restraining rabbits in order to drip potentially irritating chemicals directly into their eyes. Part of the delay to the acceptance of the alternatives was caused by the fact that scientists could not compare the results of the alternative to the rabbit test because the results from the rabbit tests were so variable.

Unfortunately, the tests are not accepted to test mild irritants, however, at the World Congress on Alternatives in Rome last week, experts showed how it was possible to use these methods in combination with in vitro cell tests to show whether chemicals and cosmetics are likely to be mildly irritating to the eyes.

Chief Executive of the BUAV, Michelle Thew, said: "The rabbit Draize eye test is a particularly controversial and cruel test. Up to 4,000 rabbits used across Europe every year could now be saved, not to mention many thousands more across the USA and Asia. We welcome the publication of these guidelines but deplore the fact that not only is there an underinvestment of non-animal alternatives, but also the lengthy process of getting official international validation of such methods can take decades. Part of the problem is the massive obstacles that are put in the path of non-animal alternatives, obstacles that the equivalent animal tests never had to face."

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Notes:

- 1) 479 Draize eye tests took place in the UK during 2008