

November 4, 2009

Charles F. Bolden Jr.
NASA Administrator
NASA Headquarters
Washington, D.C. 20546-0001

Dear Mr. Bolden:

On behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 2 million members and supporters, I am writing to urge you to halt NASA's plans to expose squirrel monkeys to radiation in a misguided effort to learn about the health effects of deep space travel on humans.

In many ways, NASA has captured the nation's collective imagination and has repeatedly demonstrated the seemingly unlimited potential of human ingenuity. Unfortunately, the agency has at times also demonstrated the potential for callousness toward the many animals we share this planet with.

In the 1950s, chimpanzees were taken from their natural habitat, kidnapped from their families, and used as crash-test dummies in experiments in which they had their necks broken and their skin burned off and were severely maimed for the purposes of testing missiles, helmets, and windshields. Since then, hundreds—perhaps thousands—of monkeys have been exposed to dangerous levels of radiation, and others, some of whom had their tails chopped off, have been launched into space on ill-fated missions that caused them to suffer from brain damage, heart failure, and other health complications from which they never recovered.

Experiments such as these not only harm animals but also suggest that human beings are not creative or compassionate enough to pursue knowledge and explore space without ruthlessly hurting others. These experiments accept human ignorance rather than seeking to overcome it; they suggest that we can do no better and that we have only the most crude methods of investigation at our disposal. The use of animals in crash tests like those conducted by NASA is a case in point. Not only do these kinds of cruel tests violate our moral sensibilities, our ingenuity and creativity have also proved that we do not need to abuse chimpanzees—or any animals—in order to collect data about how humans will be affected by different crash scenarios. Today, crude and violent animal crash tests have been completely replaced with high-speed digital imaging, computer simulations, sophisticated test dummies, and specialized data-acquisition systems.

NASA can investigate how space travel affects human beings by studying the many humans who have been to space and employing modern research methods, like human cell cultures that can be exposed to space radiation—which NASA is already funding—and that can yield results relevant to human beings, something that animal experiments cannot do. Researchers from Texas

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A&M made this very point as they studied whether dietary changes could mitigate the radiation-caused cellular damage that often accompanies space travel. They concluded that, “*Much more work must be done in humans, whether on Earth or, preferably in space, before we are able to make concrete recommendations*”ⁱ (*emphasis added*).

I am urging you to immediately end all plans to use squirrel monkeys in radiation experiments. It is scientifically improper to seek data relevant to humans by using mice, monkeys, or any nonhuman animal as a research subject, and it is ethically improper to inflict real suffering on sensitive, intelligent animals in the hope of shedding some light on the feasibility of a far-off mission to Mars.

Human inquiry need not require, and in fact, tends to be impeded by, the unethical treatment of animals. NASA’s own history appears to support this conviction.

May I hear from you regarding this urgent matter? I can be contacted at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JG' with a large loop at the bottom.

Justin Goodman
Research Associate Supervisor
Laboratory Investigations Department

ⁱN.D. Turner, L.A. Braby, J. Ford, and J.R. Lupton, “Opportunities for Nutritional Amelioration of Radiation-Induced Cellular Damage,” *Nutrition* 18.10 (2002): 904-12.