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Hidden camera captures disturbing scenes of animals in Montreal lab

By **KEVIN NEWMAN** CTV's W5
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Footage obtained by CTV's W5 appears to show mistreatment of dogs, pigs and monkeys used for testing. ITR Laboratories Canada disputes the claims, which are being investigated by the Canadian Council on Animal Care.



The L.A.-based group Last Chance for Animals embedded a technician at ITR Laboratories Canada, who recorded hours of footage inside the Montreal facility. (COURTESY OF W5)

A national council responsible for monitoring animal welfare in research laboratories is investigating hidden camera footage obtained by W5 that appears to show mistreatment of dogs, pigs and monkeys used for testing at a Montreal-based facility.

Portions of the footage — shot by the Los Angeles-based rights group Last Chance for Animals, which embedded a technician at ITR Laboratories Canada for four months — were shown to the executive director of the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC), Louise Desjardins.

She would not comment directly on what she had seen, but told *W5* that the association was in discussions with ITR about the footage.

“I do not want to pre-empt or preclude the work of the panel,” Desjardins told *W5* in an interview. “I really think that they need the time to do that work and gather all the facts.”

The video shows dogs aggressively thrown into cages, pigs restrained as they squeal, and technicians slamming animals onto stainless steel operating tables.

Hours of video have also been filed with the Quebec government, along with 17 pages of an official complaint alleging abuse and inhumane practices at the Montreal lab.

The company disputes the claim.

“ITR operates in compliance with industry standards and federal and provincial guidelines for animal care in a laboratory testing environment,” the company wrote in a statement to *W5*. “We take our responsibility to treat the animals in our care with the utmost respect very seriously.”



Every year in Canada, an estimated 3.5 million animals, including 5,000 monkeys, are used by science. Some are exposed to experimental drugs, household products and even cosmetics. (COURTESY OF W5)

CCAC, a not-for-profit association based in Ottawa that was established to develop and monitor the guidelines, has responsibility for industry oversight. Not all private labs are required to join, but those who receive federal funding grants are, as well as all university research labs. ITR Canada pays a fee to be certified by the association.

CCAC can investigate complaints, but only with the co-operation of the research labs. Last year, the association found reasons to place three facilities from among its 201 certified institutions on temporary probation.

Those fact-finding missions can take months to reach their conclusion, and rely on the co-operation of the testing facility. Canada is the only G8 country that does not have federal government inspectors with the power to enforce rules governing animal treatment in research labs.

In between her paid job as a lab technician, the undercover agent was also recording some of what she saw happening around her.

“Dogs (were) howling, crying all day long,” recalled the investigator, who asked not to be identified so she could conduct other undercover

operations. “Up and down the halls you’d go, and that’s all you would hear is the dogs howling and crying.”

Last Chance for Animals’ undercover footage provides what is believed to be the first inside look at a Canadian testing facility and focuses attention on an industry, largely unregulated, that makes animals sick so humans won’t be. The public rarely gets to see what the animals endure. While animal testing is legal, it is nevertheless very upsetting to watch.



"There are certain cases that we documented that certainly rise to the level of abuse," said Adam Wilson, who leads investigations for Last Chance for Animals. He cited video evidence of a technician striking a pair of beagles 16 times because they wouldn't look forward. (COURTESY OF W5)

Every year in Canada, an estimated three and a half million animals are used by science, some of them exposed to experimental drugs, household products and even cosmetics to test their tolerance to them.

The vast majority are mice, fish and birds, but 12,000 dogs and 5,000 monkeys are also involved in more advanced testing. The animals are bred for the purpose, sold to the labs, and live very short and often painful lives.

“There are certain cases that we documented that certainly rise to the level of abuse,” said Adam Wilson, who leads investigations for Last Chance for Animals.

Specifically, Wilson cites video evidence of a technician striking a pair of beagles 16 times because they wouldn’t look forward in preparation for exposure to chemicals through a mask.

Industry guidelines are supposed to prevent harsh treatment of animals in science. They clearly state only the minimal force necessary should be employed against lab animals.

W5 also offered to screen the video for ITR Canada. The company’s senior vice-president, Ginette Bain, did not accept repeated offers to watch it. She said she will rely on the CCAC panel’s findings on whether there are any concerns.

“ITR has zero tolerance for the mistreatment of any animals under our care and maintains procedures to ensure staff may report and discuss concerns openly,” the company wrote in a statement.



Ginette Bain, senior vice-president of ITR Canada, said the company will "take the measures necessary," but she is "convinced" that animals have not been mistreated at the lab. (COURTESY OF W5)

Approached for an interview by W5, Bain pointed to the benefits of live animal testing in the development of new medicines and drugs.

When questioned about a technician who appears to be hitting dogs in the video, she maintained that such treatment is not acceptable and not part of ITR standards, but said she still believes that animals have not been mistreated at the lab.

“We will take the measures necessary,” said Bain. “And I can tell you that I am convinced that that does not happen.

“Our business is saving lives, OK? We are committed to find treatment for a very wide varieties of ailments, like cancer or Alzheimer’s or diabetes. That’s what we do,” Bain said.

Hundreds of staff work at the ITR facility on Montreal’s West Island. Thousands are employed in the industry nationwide.

A private member’s bill is slowly working its way through the Senate that would ban cosmetic testing on animals in Canada. But that is a small part of the testing industry.

The vast majority of the clients of ITR, according to documents obtained by the undercover animal rights agent, are large pharmaceutical companies hoping to prove with animal testing what the safe dose for humans will be for a new generation of drugs.

The W5 investigative documentary “In the Name of Science” airs Saturday at 7 p.m. on CTV.