

801 Old York Rd., #204
Jenkintown, PA 19046-1685
Tel: (215)887-0816
Fax: (215)887-2088
E-mail: aavs@aavs.org
www.aavs.org



N E W S R E L E A S E

For Immediate Release: December 18, 2007

Glowing Cats Are Cruel, Not Cool

*Animal Advocacy Group Slams Inhumane and Wasteful Experiment
to Clone Transgenic Cats who Glow*

Jenkintown, PA— The American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS), a non-profit animal advocacy organization, is condemning the production of cloned fluorescent cats in South Korea as cruel and wasteful of scientific resources. Last week, scientists in South Korea announced that they had cloned transgenic cats with a fluorescent protein that makes them glow when exposed to ultraviolet light. AAVS is calling on the scientists to halt their experiments and redirect their attention to more humane and fruitful pursuits.

The scientists who cloned the fluorescent kittens claim that they are proof that cats can be genetically modified and cloned to produce models of human disease. However, the sheer waste of life and tremendous effort it takes to produce just one cat makes this an unrealistic pursuit, not to mention unjustifiable.

In cloning, more than 95% of attempts fail, resulting in diseased and deformed animals. The genetic engineering process is worse, since the genetic modification often does not occur in predictable or intended ways. Furthermore, the genetic modification itself can cause significant suffering.

“Animals suffer terribly as a result of both the cloning and genetic engineering processes,” says Nina Mak, Research Analyst at AAVS. “Cats are beloved pets for millions of Americans. I don’t think the American public, or the international community at large, would support this kind of research with cats, given how invasive the procedures are and the potential to cause the cats extreme pain and distress.”

AAVS also questions the scientific value of such research. It is widely recognized that animal research is costly, time-consuming, and unreliable, and greater attention needs to be paid to developing alternative models that eliminate the use of animals. Cloning and genetic engineering in particular require vast amounts of money, time, and training to perform. “It’s irresponsible and unethical to be investing in this kind of research,” said Tracie Letterman, Executive Director of AAVS. “The resources that went into this cat cloning experiment would have been better used for research that is more directly relevant to humans.”

According to the USDA, the use of cats in research has been steadily declining over the past 30 years, with 21,637 cats used in research in the U.S in 2006. If transgenic cats are commercialized as models for biomedical research, that number will increase dramatically, as will the percentage of cats who will suffer from unalleviated pain and distress. This research leads us down a path where scientists can delete, add, or change any gene they want to in cats just to see what happens, with little concern for the welfare of the animals, and with little likelihood that they will find any cures.

The South Korean scientists also say that they could use this technology to create “designer pets” or to clone tigers, leopards, and other wild cats. “There is no justification for cloning pets. We should not make light of the suffering that occurs with cloning by marketing these animals as the latest fad,” says Letterman. “Shelters are already overflowing with deserving cats in need of loving homes.”

Nor does cloning make sense for species conservation, as it does not address the real problems that are threatening animals with extinction, such as habitat loss, environmental pollution, and poaching. Furthermore, cloning does not create genetic diversity, which is essential to species survival. Scientists should not be taking valuable time and money away from more necessary and productive conservation efforts.

AAVS is calling on the scientists in South Korea to embrace the future of medical research and redirect their attention to investigations that are more likely to help humans without involving the use of animals. Says Mak, “AAVS supports scientific advancement, and we all want to cure disease, but we should focus on research that will provide the maximum benefit for the minimum harm.”

###

The American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS) is the oldest non-profit animal advocacy and educational organization in the United States dedicated to ending experiments on animals in research, testing, and education. Founded in Philadelphia in 1883, AAVS pursues its objectives through legal and effective advocacy, education, and support of the development of non-animal alternative methods.