South Korea promoting law on animal experiments
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Korean authorities are pushing for a law that would subject the nation's animal research laboratories to strict regulations.

The Korea Food & Drug Administration (KFDA) said yesterday that it planned to submit a draft to the National Assembly in the first half of this year of what it hopes will be the nation's first law on animal experiments.

The proposed law, which the KFDA drew up with the Korean Association for Laboratory Animal Science (KALAS), a professional organization representing biomedical researchers, universities or research laboratories will be required to report to the KFDA when setting up new animal laboratories.

Institutions also must establish special committees that will determine whether certain animal experiments are necessary and if the methods of experimentation meet certain ethical and scientific standards.

The law sets guidelines aimed at minimizing animal use and distress, and establishes codes for euthanasia and pain relief.

In addition, the KFDA will have the authority to shut down sub-standard animal experimentation laboratories.

"The law will create an environment in which researchers will be obliged to apply a higher set of ethical guidelines when conducting animal experiments," said Chae Kab-ryong, chief of the laboratory animal resources division at the KFDA.

Chae said he hopes the law will be enacted before Korea holds the World Cup soccer finals so as to fend off international criticism aimed at the nation for being hostile to animals.

Currently, there are no laws governing animal experiments in Korea, leaving science and medical labs to follow their own guidelines, while government monitoring has also been very passive.

The absence of national guidelines and the "indiscreet" ways Korean labs have performed animal experiments have invited heavy criticism from animal rights activists from home and abroad.

"We expect the implementation of the law to reduce the number of unnecessary animal experiments by a large margin," Chae said.

It remains to be seen, however, how animal rights groups will react to the proposed law.

Park Chang-kil, a professor at Sungkonghoe University who leads Voice for Animals, feels the proposed law is not string enough.
"Institutions must first meet a certain set of ethical and other guidelines before they are approved to operate animal labs. Being required merely to report to the KFDA is not enough," said Park.

Park also said institutions must be required to exercise more impartiality in appointing members of a committee that determines whether certain animal experiments are necessary.

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