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Safe use of products to eradicate rats, mice and similar domestic pests

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Who will rid me of these rats?

That was the cry of the Mayor of Hamelin in 1284, when the German town was infested with vermin. He turned to a mysterious pied piper for help, but it didn't go well. The rats disappeared, but so did all the town's children, when the mayor refused to pay the piper's fee.

Today when we have rat or mouse infestations around the house we generally turn to products sold at the local hardware store or supermarket. "We want these treatments to go well for everyone except the mice and rats," says the Environmental Protection Authority's General Manager of Hazardous Substances and New Organisms, Dr Fiona Thomson-Carter.

The EPA is responsible for approving hazardous substances such as these, and sets conditions for their safe use.

"We want to emphasise that these products – and there are a wide range of them – are by their nature harmful. They may be sold as pellets, pastes or in blocks. All need to be used with care. They pose health risks to users, children and anyone who comes into contact with them. They can also be harmful to domestic pets, other animals, birds and the environment," says Dr Thomson-Carter.

To remind householders about how to stay safe with these products, the EPA has issued a **Caution Notice**, setting out recommended safety measures. "As a proactive regulator, the EPA wants to ensure consumers have good information about the safe use of potentially harmful products we approve," Dr Thomson-Carter says.

The Caution Notice provides information about how to handle, use and store these products, how to dispose of them safely, and what to do if accidental exposure occurs.

"The safest way to apply these products is by using a bait station, which is a container that holds the bait, making it accessible to the target rodents but preventing children from being able to touch it directly. A bait station with a "floor" also prevents the poison from coming into contact with the ground, reducing the chance of environmental contamination," Dr Thomson-Carter says.

"It is completely possible to use these products safely, provided all precautions are taken," says Dr Thomson-Carter.

The [Caution Notice](#) is available on the EPA's website.

What we do: The EPA sets the rules for the use of hazardous substances under the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act by assessing the environmental and economic risks and benefits to New Zealanders and the environment.

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Caution Notice

This Notice sets out good practice measures for householders using over-the-counter harmful products to eradicate rats, mice and other similar pests around the home. Such products are widely used, and it is important users remain alert to the dangers they can present, and take measures to overcome them.

Background

The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) sets the rules for the use of hazardous substances and new organisms under the Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996 by assessing the environmental and economic risks and benefits to New Zealanders and the environment. It has approved for sale to consumers a range of products designed to kill mice, rats and similar pests around the home. The EPA sets controls for the safe use of these products. Over the years, many products have been approved to kill rats and mice, and they contain different active ingredients.

For that reason, various controls have been specified over the years, according to the nature of each individual product and best practice at the time. The EPA has issued this Caution Notice to outline best practice approaches today.

These products may come in the form of pastes, pellets, or blocks. They are poisonous, and can be harmful to human, animal, aquatic and bird life. The safety of children, pets, and people who may chance across these substances in an uncontrolled situation, is of particular concern. The products may also harm the environment, especially waterways.

Some products contain a bittering agent, aimed at deterring non-target animals and children from ingesting them. This is usually noted on the product label. Such products remain attractive to rats and mice.

Good practice measures for safe use of these products

Personal Protection:

- Wear non-absorbent gloves when handling the product or dead rodents
- Do not eat, drink or smoke while using the product
- On completion, wash your hands and all areas of exposed skin with soap and water
- Wash gloves thoroughly after each use

First Aid:

- Contact a doctor immediately and phone the National Poisons Centre on 0800 764 766
- If product gets in your eyes, skin or hair, wash thoroughly with water; remove and wash any contaminated clothing

Storage and use:

- Store the product in its original container, out of the reach of children and away from foodstuffs, including animal food
- Store securely in a cool, well-ventilated place
- Avoid laying baits in places accessible by children, pets or other non-target animals
- Refrain from laying baits in areas liable to flooding

Bait Stations:

- Bait stations are recommended as the safest way of using these products
- Each station should have a "floor" so the product does not come in contact with the environment and cannot be scattered by target creatures or other animals
- Bait stations make it less likely that children will come into contact with the baits. They generally are not easily opened by children.

Protecting non-target animals

- Do not let dogs, cats, or any other non-target animal come into contact with the product
- If such contact does occur, contact a veterinarian immediately
- The product label may provide guidance for veterinarians about antidote procedures

Spillage:

- Should a spill occur, prevent further spillage
- Wear gloves to collect spilled product, return to the original container and seal tightly
- Wash the affected area with water and detergent, collect the residues and place in a sealed container for disposal at landfill

Disposal:

- Dispose of animal carcasses by burning or burying
- Carcasses may contain traces of product, so keep them away from children, pets, and other animals
- Retrieve all uneaten baits, wrap, place in plastic bag and dispose at landfill
- Do not retain the product container or use it for any other purpose
- Wrap empty containers and dispose at landfill

Conclusion

Chemical products designed to kill household pests such as rats and mice are harmful, and caution and judgment should be exercised when handling, using, storing and disposing of them. The EPA may consider reviewing the controls currently in place to protect people, animals and the environment from harm. Meanwhile, this Caution Notice provides common sense safety tips for consumers.

Questions and Answers

Q: What is a Caution Notice?

A: It is a way that the EPA can alert consumers to dangers posed by particular hazardous substances. As a proactive regulator, we want to advise the public of hazards and provide common sense guidance about how to stay safe and protect the environment. We want to be in constant communication with the public in this way.

Q: Is this a new approach?

A: It's the first time we've issued a Caution Notice, but we've always communicated with consumers as safety issues arise, via our website [epa.govt.nz](http://www.epa.govt.nz), Facebook page, @epa Safer Homes, and media releases. This is just a sharper form of communication.

Q: Have there been recent instances of poisoning or contamination from use of rodent baits? If not, what has given rise to this initiative?

A: Fortunately, there have been very few reported incidents, with fewer than 10 recorded over the past four years. There may be some instances that go unreported, but the EPA's Caution Notice is motivated by wanting to promote, maintain and enhance consumer safety. It is not a response to any surge in incidents.

Q: What is your advice to householders when purchasing and using products to kill rodents?

A: To apply common sense and follow the good practice safety measures outlined in the EPA's Caution Notice.