



EPA Proposes Ban on Rat and Mouse Poisons

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has announced plans to ban 20 rat and mouse control products because they use loose bait. The products are especially dangerous, EPA claims, because they are sold for use in homes where unsupervised children or pets may come into contact with them.

Need for Effective Products

Pest controls manufacturer d-CON makes 12 of the 20 products that are being targeted by EPA. Sabrina Rodgers, d-CON's marketing director, says the corporation will fight the proposed ban.

"We want to ensure that cost-effective rodent control options remain available to consumers. EPA's actions ignore the proven benefits of the products in question, which have been used safely by consumers for more than 50 years," Rodgers said. "If EPA's actions are not challenged, the outcome could have a profound impact on the public by forcing consumers to choose from inferior, less safe, or potentially more expensive pest-management approaches."

"The EPA decision has also overlooked the adverse consequences that could arise from its actions if rat populations increase dramatically, resulting in a possible public health issue," Rodgers explained.

Rodgers noted EPA's proposed ban could also have other profound effects on the public, such as forcing people to rely on products from an alternate class of rodenticides which, unlike the d-CON products targeted by EPA, have no antidote.

Increase in Infestations Expected

EPA's decision could also force consumers to avoid treating their homes for rodents unless they can afford to hire a pest control professional to use the ingredients denied to individuals. Because some families do not have the discretionary income to pay for professional applicators, they may rely on less-effective treatments should EPA's recommendations take effect, or they may have to endure a rodent outbreak without treating it, which can lead to health problems.

H. Sterling Burnett, a senior fellow with the National Center for Policy Analysis, says EPA's proposed ban is another example of the federal government flexing its muscles in a manner that is neither necessary nor helpful to consumers.

"There is no question these rodenticides can cause harm in someone who misuses them, but are we prepared to ban them entirely and allow rodents, mice, and other vermin to destroy 25 percent of our food stocks the way they do throughout the rest of the world?" asked Burnett.

"These pesticides keep foods sanitary while in the home. If we didn't have them, we would all be at risk from rats and other vermin spreading disease," Burnett explained.

Informational Role

Government should only be in the business of telling us what the risks are and leaving the decision of whether or not to use a rodenticide up to the individual consumer, said Burnett.

"When it comes to consumer choice, government's role should be nothing more than informational. Our regulators need to get the macro picture. They need to look at the danger this new rule poses to the food supply and the damage that will occur if rats and mice appreciably multiply due to the removal of these products from the market," Burnett explained.

Parents Should Decide

Todd M. Wynn, director of the Energy, Environment, and Agriculture Task Force for the American Legislative Exchange Council, expresses similar concern about government overreach regarding rodenticides. Wynn worries where the EPA's decision might lead.

"Unfortunately, EPA expands its reach into the American economy more and more each and every year. This year it will be d-Con, but next year another useful product will be burdened by additional regulations or banned outright from the market," Wynn said.

Wynn says EPA is basing its decision on a single statistic: between 1993 and 2008 the American Association of Poison Control Centers received 12,000 to 15,000 reports of rat and mouse poison exposures each year regarding children under 6 years old. Improper use, however, is not a good enough reason to ban such useful product from the market, argues Wynn.

"Each year, hundreds of thousands of children are treated for bicycle-related injuries; nearly half of these children are diagnosed with traumatic brain injuries. Does that mean we should ban bicycles? We allow parents to make these choices every day, but EPA steps in and seeks to make these decisions instead of American families," Wynn said.

"There are certain levels of acceptable risk in society, and parents play an important role by weighing the potential risks and benefits of using a product. This is not saying there is no government role in consumer protection, but one must be sure there is a proper assessment of the science and risk involved and not base regulations and bans on emotionally driven statistics of exposure to children," he explained.

More Disease Likely

Wynn notes people living in poverty are most afflicted by rodent problems, and they will be the ones most adversely affected by the proposed ban, with professional exterminators likely to be too expensive for them. Without timely treatment, rodent problems can cause serious health problems.

“Any time government intervenes in the marketplace, there will be unintended consequences. In this case, it could mean more expensive, less effective, and less readily available rodent control ironically harming public health by leading to the spread of more rodent-borne diseases,” Wynn observed.