

Client: CRRU
Purpose: Press release
Status: Approved by Alan B 8-4-09; issued to press
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Making a public commitment to responsible rodenticide use

The Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU) has established a supporters club for individuals and companies working in pest control who want to make a public commitment to applying the seven point CRRU code. According to CRRU chairman Dr Alan Buckle, the code promotes best practice in rodent control. "It helps rural users get the best results from their rodent control programmes, while at the same time reducing to a minimum any potential harmful effects on wildlife," he says.

Supporters club members are entitled to use CRRU's 'Think Wildlife' logo on business materials and vehicle livery, and to have their name and company logo featured on the supporters club webpage (www.thinkwildlife.org.uk/supporters.php).

The club has 15 inaugural members located from Manchester to Malta, and Norfolk to Northern Ireland.¹ Membership is free of charge and applicants are required to sign a declaration and commitment to applying the CRRU code consistently, accurately and comprehensively in their rodent control work.

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According to the CRRU code, an effective rat control initiative has three parts: (i) Baiting and killing to eliminate target rat colonies; (ii) rodent proofing sensitive areas for prevent access; and (iii) cleaning and tidying to deny food and shelter and make the site as unsuitable as possible for a new colony. Its seven specific points are:

[1] A planned approach. Study the location of the infestation carefully and identify the colony's home range. However, don't tidy up or move things yet because disturbance may deter rats from taking bait or even displace them to another location. Draw a plan of the target area.

[2] Use enough baiting points at locations all over the target home range. Mark each location on the site plan. Remember, half measures are pointless. Using enough baiting points from the outset will minimise the time taken for control to be achieved and also reduce exposure time for non-target species.

[3] Record quantity of bait at each location, then note signs of rat activity at each point as the treatment period progresses. Follow the rodenticide label instructions accurately.

[4] Collect and dispose of rodent bodies regularly both during and after the treatment period. This is one of the most important points on the CRRU code. The carcasses may contain rodenticide and, if eaten by predators or scavengers, could be a source of wildlife exposure. Dead rats may be found for several days after eating bait and they may die 100 metres or more away from the baited site. Dispose of rodent bodies as recommended on the product label.

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[5] Never allow bait to be exposed to non-target species. Where possible, use materials already in the target home range (e.g. concrete blocks, slates, bricks, corrugated sheets, etc) to protect bait from rain, dust and access by non-target species. Tamper-resistant bait stations are available and offer the highest level of protection of bait from non-target animals and human contact. Use these where covers made from other materials may not be secure enough.

[6] Inspect every bait location regularly, as recommended on the product label, and replenish accordingly. Keep a record of each inspection, what you found and any action taken; this is important if you are subsequently required to demonstrate good practice. Also be alert for signs of disturbance by non-target animals.

[7] Remove all bait from every location at the end of the treatment period and make a record on the site plan that you have done so. As soon as the treatment period is over, it is also essential to make sensitive areas rodent-proof, and generally clean and tidy the entire site to minimise its suitability to re-colonisation. If this isn't done, a new colony will be established and you'll be back to square one.

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In addition to fleas and mites, rats carry multiple disease organisms including Cryptosporidium, Campylobacter, Listeria, Toxoplasma, Salmonella and Leptospira. The Health Protection Agency reports 76 confirmed cases of leptospirosis in humans during the last year for which data is available (2006).² Not all cases could be linked to a potential cause, but among those where this was possible, one-in-four were farmers. Among the 76 cases, two were fatal.

It is also estimated, says Dr Buckle, that half of all farm fires are started by rat damage. He adds that rats eat an estimated 210 tonnes of animal feed and cereals a day in the UK, and contaminate what they don't eat with faeces and urine.

In February 2009, The Sun newspaper declared that Britain was "plagued by 80m rats"³, although in 2004, the International Pest Control journal quoting Roger Quy of the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) estimated the UK rat population to be 10.5 million.⁴

In March this year, the Yorkshire coastal village of Flamborough was re-named "Ratville UK" by the Daily Mail as a result of becoming "overrun with rodents"⁵. On top of all these factors, of course, Dr Buckle points out that farmers are required to control rats and other vermin for compliance with farm assurance schemes.

However, he stressed that the imperatives to control rats are matched by the need to do so responsibly. "Otherwise, indiscriminate or ill-disciplined use of rodenticides poses all manner of threats in the rural community," he cautions.⁶

"Children, pets and non-target animals are all at risk of poisoning from poorly positioned baits. Predatory birds including red kites, barn owls and kestrels are at risk of 'secondary contamination' if they eat the carcasses of rats killed by rodenticide and not collected and disposed of promptly.

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“Moreover, government surveillance of pesticide use and wildlife casualties means that perpetrators of irresponsible rodenticide use face identification and prosecution.”

Dr Buckle says the launch of CRRU’s supporters club aims to help pest controllers address this complex set of circumstances in which they work on a daily basis.

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Follow up story potential: It is planned to interview some inaugural members of the supporters club about their reasons for joining and the benefits they derive from membership. If you are interested in publishing a follow up article based around these interviews, please contact Phil Christopher.

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References (listed primarily for authenticity, not necessarily for publication depending on your house style)

¹ <http://www.thinkwildlife.org.uk/supporters.php> 15 inaugural members are listed.

² http://www.hpa.org.uk/webw/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1195733801084?p=1191942172102.

³ Tim Spanton, 4th February 2008. Britain plagued by 80m rats. The Sun. <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/article757835.ece> retrieved 12th March 2009.

⁴ International Pest Control, Jul-Aug 2004, vol 46, p202-203.

⁵ Paul Harris, 11th March 2009. Ratville UK. Fear and loathing rule in a corner of Yorkshire overrun with rodents Daily Mail.

⁶ HSE (1999). Agricultural Information Sheet No. 31 Safe Use of Rodenticides on Farms and Holdings Available from HSE Books. Bootle, Merseyside. Health and Safety Executive: 4.

⁷ Campaign Against Illegal Poisoning of Wildlife, 20th March 2009. <http://www.caip-uk.info/>. Information also available at <http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/environment.asp?id=504>