



Safety Alert

Use of Rodent Baits in Schools

Previous Incident

- Ill health effects were experienced by a teacher after she was exposed to dust from a rodent bait box.
- The teacher was replacing items in a cupboard when she dislodged a rodent bait box. The box fell onto her face and she inhaled the aqua-green dust from the box.
- Initially this caused the teacher to cough and later that night she had an asthma attack and vomited.
- The bait consisted of a small cardboard box (approximately the size of a whiteboard duster) containing pellets of rodent bait. The pellets had deteriorated into a dusty form that could be inhaled.
- The rodent bait was *BASF Storm Wax Block Rodenticide*; there are other similar types of rodent baits available.
- Investigations found that the bait had been placed in the school by a pest controller however; no record of the location of baits and no process to collect the baits had been established.

Nature & Extent of Hazard

- The substance was not considered a “hazardous substance” according to the criteria of Worksafe Australia. However, products that are not listed as “hazardous”, can still cause significant health effects. The CHEMWATCH Material Safety Data Sheet states that the material is toxic if swallowed and may be fatal.
- Swallowing is a likely route of entry into the body for children in a primary school and pre-school environment.
- A hazard exists particularly if students have access to baits. The colour and size of the pellets could be attractive to children.
- Inhalation is generally not a normal route of entry when the product is in pellet form, however the dust generated from the substance can cause discomfort to the upper respiratory tract and lungs and may be harmful.
- If baits are left for long periods, they can deteriorate into a powdery form that can be inhaled.
- Because of the location of baits, they can easily be forgotten or missed when it is time for collection.
- Information from pest controllers recommends that baits be left in place for at least a two-week period for the baiting system to be effective.

Suggested Control Measures

- Contractual arrangements with all pest controllers should include an assessment of health and safety risks associated with the performing pest control work at the school. This risk assessment must involve consultation with the school.

- Discussions with pest controllers should involve the following:
 - o Appropriate times for application
 - o Eradication methods available
 - o Written procedure to be followed
 - o Areas to be treated (map of bait locations)
 - o The appropriate products for use, including rates of application
 - o Follow up action needed (collection time frames if packaged materials are used)
 - o Provision of the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for all products before treatment commences
 - o First aid procedures in the event of accidental ingestion or inhalation
 - o Correct disposal of any rat carcasses found

- Appropriate times for application should be agreed prior to pest control activities. Use traps or baits that can be laid and taken away in periods when students are not present at the school, for example over the week-end or school holidays.
- Where there is no follow up visit to retrieve the baits by a pest controller, a process must be implemented by the school to retrieve all baits. This should include the nomination of a person and schedule to collect the baits. The pest controller should supply information regarding the safe collection and disposal procedures.
- Schools that may have had bait treatments in the past should thoroughly check the school for any baits that may not have been collected from past pest control activities.
- Any person exposed to a substance should be taken to a doctor immediately for a medical assessment.
- Contact your local council's environmental health officer to discuss appropriate methods to dispose of rodent carcasses.

Use of rodent baits in schools when no pest controller is contracted:

A number of schools have enquired about the use of baits to control mice. It is permissible for a school to have a controlled baiting program that reflects the risks involved:

Suggested control measures to ensure the safe use of baits are:

- Keep a written record of numbers of baits laid and recovered
- Place baits in areas inaccessible to children
- Alternatively lay on Friday after school and pick up first thing Monday morning
- Use baits with relatively low toxicity
- Follow the directions on the package
- Access the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for the bait before treatment commences
- Ensure all baits are retrieved after a reasonable time
- Purchase baits only on an 'as required' basis to eliminate storage
- Maintain good hygiene practice, eg washing hands after handling the baits

Other points to consider:

- Swallowing is a likely route of entry into the body for children in a primary school and pre-school environment.
- Pre school-age children accompanying volunteer parents are probably the most at risk group.
- The colour & size of baits could make them attractive to children.
- Because baits are placed in various locations, usually under or behind cupboards they can easily be forgotten or missed when it's time for collection.