

**Flemish government**

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**OPINION 28/09/2023 – Flemish Animal Welfare Council**

**More humane control of rats and mice**

The Flemish Animal Welfare advocates a **more humane control** of rats and mice.

**Prevention**

The focus here lies upon **prevention**, which is always the first and most important step in controlling rats and mice.

These animals move around easily, so an attractive location will be reoccupied if the cause is not addressed. What is more, prevention is the most animal-friendly and, over time, the most efficient and effective method. It is also the case that not all types of mice can be controlled.

Prevention means removing food scraps, avoiding creating any nesting and hiding places and restricting openings.

**Methods of control that are not animal friendly**

If the preventive measures taken are unsuccessful, the next step is to trap or control the rats and mice.

This can be carried out by a whole range of methods, some of which are inherently more unfriendly to animals than others. In a 2021 study by the INBO (Institute for Nature and Forest Research) and Ghent University that was commissioned by the Animal Welfare Department, several methods were evaluated to determine their efficiency and humaneness. Methods that are widely used or on the rise but which scored very poorly in terms of animal welfare are:

- **Anticoagulants**

Anticoagulants, which are more commonly known as **mouse or rat poison** and are some of the most frequently used methods. As methods go, however, this causes the animals pain, so it is very inhumane to animals. Anticoagulants affect the clotting of the blood and one to two days after ingesting the poison, internal bleeding occurs in the muscles, joints and brain, among others.

That bleeding in itself is not painful, but the accumulation of blood in the various organs is. Usually four to six days after the anticoagulants are absorbed, the rats and mice die in severe pain due to anaemia or organ failure. In addition, there is a risk of secondary poisoning in predators and scavengers and a risk of animals developing resistance.

- **Glue traps**

**Glue traps** are also not humane. The animals are immobilised while conscious: the paws or fur of captured animals irrevocably stick to the trap and certain death awaits them, usually from dehydration or starvation. If they attempt to escape, they can also suffer serious injuries, such as tearing off their skin or suffering broken limbs.

- **Drowning traps**

**Drowning traps** have already been banned for animal welfare reasons in Sweden and France, among others. The reason they were banned speaks for itself: death by drowning occurs only after a long time has elapsed. This type of trapping is acceptable, however, if the animals are immediately anaesthetised after ending up in an anaesthetic liquid. In the case of the drowning traps containing anaesthetic liquid that are currently available on the market, it has not yet been proven that the animals are actually stunned.

- **Cholecalciferol**

This **vitamin D3**-based product recently became available on the Belgian market as an alternative to anticoagulants. Cholecalciferol intoxication is associated with elevated levels of calcium and phosphorus in the blood, which lead to calcifications in the lung, the kidneys and in the blood vessel walls. Among other things, the animals become drowsy, have limited appetite and vomit (blood). Eventually, 4 to 7 days after ingestion, general organ failure causes death. Given the long symptomatic period and intensity of the symptoms, this method is not conducive to animal welfare.

That is why the Flemish Council for Animal Welfare is calling for **a ban on the sale and use of anticoagulants** (agents that prevent blood clotting), **glue traps, drowning traps and cholecalciferol** as methods of controlling rats and mice. This prohibition should apply in all cases to **private individuals**.

### **More humane control of rats and mice**

The Animal Welfare Council suggests consulting the **Animal Welfare Department website** for information about humane controlling rats and mice. A **decision tree** helps users reach a decision in a specific situation. **Brochures** for local government entities and private individuals can also be consulted.

In situations where all of the preventive measures taken do not work and **controlling mice and rats** is nevertheless essential, the methods that are used must avoid the unintentional capture of other species as much as possible and must cause a rapid death. Examples of such methods are **mousetraps** and **electrocution traps**. A good mousetrap will kill a mouse or rat immediately or extremely quickly. Further scientific research into alternative control methods is desirable.

Footnote:

*Andibel, Boerenbond, Nationale Raad van Dieren Liefhebbers and Nederlandstalige Gewestelijke Raad van de Orde der Dierenartsen (NGROD) do not agree with a ban on the sale and use of anticoagulants. They fear an increase in the number of mice and rats, which could increase the risk of disease transmission (including leptospirosis) in animals and humans.*

*These organisations take the view that too few methods are available that can serve as alternatives to anticoagulants, while still providing effective pest control. They question the effectiveness and animal friendliness of the rat and mouse traps available today and judge that focusing on prevention and on alternative means such as traps is not enough and, that consequently, the number of mice and rats will increase.*

*The organisations anticipate that a ban that is only applicable to private individuals will have no effect on pest welfare. What is more, they are also concerned that this measure will have an impact on the less prosperous segment of the population, which does not have the financial capacity to use a specialist firm in cases where rats and/or mice are causing significant nuisance.*

*Boerenbond is calling for greater awareness of and more research into the best available alternatives and for an impact study involving all concerned.*