

11-9-18 Mice and us and all the other creatures

Yes, it is time, despite the warm temperatures, for all creatures to begin preparations for winter. We are most rudely made aware of this fact by the presence of the field and house mice. They are smart enough to store seeds and nuts, find nesting materials and to look for shelter. That shelter may be your central air conditioning condenser, your not-used-every-day vehicle, your grill, your lawn mower or your shed, or your house. The nesting material could be natural, such as dry grass, but why gather that when your cushions or your tarp or your gloves are right there?

I was double reminded of people's desire to keep mice out of their home and the harm that can result from some "rodent-proofing" methods when I saw two recent Facebook postings

First, I saw this from the New England Wildlife Center in Weymouth:

"Hello friends, yesterday we admitted an American Bald Eagle in critical condition. I am so sad to tell you, that while this eagle had severe injuries, rodenticide (rat) poisoning was likely the underlying cause of his death. There are only 70 nesting pairs of Bald Eagles in Massachusetts. This terrible tragedy was entirely preventable. Many environmentally safe rodent control alternatives are on the market today that do not adversely affect the birds of prey or large mammals that feed on them. Please help us get the word out. Rodenticide kills hawks, owls... and the American Bald Eagle. It also harms and is fatal for dogs and cats.

When the American Bald Eagle was admitted, a full veterinary work up was done, our veterinary team found several life- threatening injuries, one of which caused a large amount of blood loss. Further diagnostics revealed a delayed blood clotting time which indicates exposure to anticoagulant rodenticides, aka rat poison. Unfortunately, due to the extent of his injuries our vet team made the difficult decision with the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and wildlife to humanely euthanize him and end his suffering."

I shared the post.

Then, a couple days later I began to see posts from enterprising people advertising their pest control services, especially for mice at this time of year. They say such things as, "It's that time of year again and we'd love to help you with this

issue. Fully licensed and insured.” One such posting said their products are all EPA approved. I responded to the post with this:

“EPA allows rodenticides. Rodenticides kill owl, hawks, and eagles, along with outdoor cats and dogs. The animal rescue place in Weymouth had to recently euthanize a bald eagle because it had ingested rodenticides. Plugging entry holes and deterring with substances they don’t like, such as peppermint, are the way to go. If you can’t find all the entry holes to plug, traps are efficient and won’t kill other animals.”

George Carlin could do a great bit on this! He might say something like this: *You want to kill the rodent, but you don’t want to think about it. So, you hire someone to do it for you. They don’t call themselves Animal Killers. They call their companies Pest Control. Oh, that’s so nice. They control them. How do they control the pests? They kill them. How do they kill them? Well, rather than telling you they kill them with poison, they tell you they use EPA approved products. What is the EPA approved product? It is a rodenticide. That is a strange word. Something about it sounds familiar. Oh, yeah, it reminds me of homicide, suicide, matricide, pesticide and herbicide. And there are so many more words ending in “cide” for the killing of someone or something. How do they get the mice to eat the poison, so they can be killed? Remember, Pest Controllers don’t call it poison; they call it bait. The word is selected purposely to help us to not think about the killing business. It sounds as though the mice are being lured into the little box, referred to as a “station”. You know, like a service station. And those rodents just can’t resist something delicious inside. People have heard the mice then get thirsty and go outside in search of water, where they just somehow disappear. Happy ending for the person who hired the Pest Controller and who did not want to think about killing.*

It turns out that lots of people never thought about what happens to the mouse once it dies from the “bait” or how it dies. The most popular type of rodenticide is called an anticoagulant. This prevents the mouse's blood from clotting, causing internal bleeding that eventually kills the rodent. When an animal eats the bait directly, it is called primary poisoning. Secondary poisoning is caused by eating poisoned prey.

While I do not have statistics on how often secondary poisoning occurs, I do know that raptors are our best form of rodent control and I know they sometimes die from eating rodents that have ingested the rodenticide, as did the bald eagle.

Some-times is too many times.

We have other choices, safe choices. Plug the holes, sprinkle peppermint and if you can't find all the entry holes, using a trap is humane and non-toxic.

This is a tough topic with better choices than the most common ones. Let's go with the better.

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax. She can be reached ay 781 293 6768 or cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us