

SUPPORT: H.4931

An Act relative to pesticides

Sponsor: Representative Jim Hawkins

Status: In the Committee on Bills in Third Reading (Reported favorably from Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture, and from House Committee on Ways and Means)

Overview:

This legislation would monitor and reduce the use of Second Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (SGARs) in Massachusetts to protect our wildlife and pets.

What are SGARs and why this bill is needed:

Second Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (SGARs) are a particularly toxic group of poisons used as a form of rodent control. SGARs, when ingested, prevent the clotting of blood, and cause the animal who ingested it to sustain heavy internal bleeding, eventually causing death. The poison remains in the dead or dying rodent's system for days.



SGARs impact non-targeted pets and wildlife populations, such as birds of prey, that rely on the poisoned rodents as a food source. As a result, the cats and dogs, hawks, eagles, owls, and bobcats that are exposed often suffer the same fatal hemorrhaging as their meal.

The effects of SGARs are widely known. In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took steps to reduce the availability of SGARs out of concern for the unintentional secondary or, in some cases, tertiary exposure. Although SGARs are not made available to consumers for non-commercial purposes, pesticide companies rely heavily on the use of SGARs to manage rodent problems. In addition, consumers may still purchase SGARs in bulk online at commonly-used retailers such as Amazon.com.

What this bill will do:

IPM in public institutions of higher education: The legislation also requires the increased use of integrated pest management (IPM) strategies in Massachusetts. It would require public institutions of higher education to adopt IPM strategies (state law already requires schools and child care centers to adopt IPM strategies). IPM uses multiple methods to prevent and address rodent problems. For example, an IPM plan could include sealing building holes and cracks, adequately sealing trash and dumpsters, and removing nesting materials from problem areas to discourage rodents.

Digitization of pest control forms: H. 3991 also requires digitization of pesticide use forms to allow for better data collection and monitoring and requires data on pesticide use in the Commonwealth to be made available annually. Currently, licensed and certified pesticide applicators are required to submit annual reports detailing the quantities of all pesticides used. Pesticide dealers are also required to submit annual sales reports for restricted use products. However these forms are paper-based, often hand-written, and not regularly monitored, making

them difficult to access, interpret, and completed with little continuity. Digitizing these forms will allow for better tracking of rodenticide use statewide and facilitate greater ease of use by state agencies and researchers.

Why is this bill needed:

Impacts on wildlife: The impacts of SGARs on wildlife have been documented across Massachusetts. A study published in 2011, for example, showed that a stunning 86% of 161 birds of prey had some form of second generation anticoagulants in their liver tissue.¹ A second study, from 2012-2016, found rates of 96%.² Dr. Murray, a researcher at the Tufts Wildlife Clinic at Cummings Veterinary Medical Center at Tufts University, notes that these birds are representative of the state, and that “the food chain is extensively contaminated.” While the rodenticide may not always kill these non-target animals, it can impact their ability to reproduce and sicken them. Animal control officers and veterinarians in the Commonwealth have seen, for example, birds of prey fall out of trees from muscle weakness and choke on their own blood from internal bleeding as a result of having ingested rodenticide.



MassWildlife confirmed this bald eagle was killed by rodenticide from eating poisoned prey (May 2021).

“Year after year we see the devastating effects these poisons have on our local wildlife. Our hospitals provide emergency veterinary care to hundreds of animals annually who are suffering from the effects of SGAR's, and we know there are thousands more that never make it in for treatment. The health of our ecosystem and communities depend on the services these predators provide. It is time to empower people to make better choices when it comes to rodent control.” - Zak Mertz, Executive Director of the Birdsey Cape Wildlife Center

Reducing the use of rodenticides by promoting the use of IPM strategies and providing education materials to homeowners will benefit these non-targeted species who are just looking for a meal. With fewer SGARs in the environment, other species are less likely to be inadvertently poisoned.

Impacts on pets and their families: Unfortunately, wildlife are not the only animals impacted by these poisons. The MSPCA's Angell Animal Medical Centers alone see dozens of cases of companion animal poisoning each year. Homeowners and landlords hire companies that put out poison, not knowing it can be dangerous to their pets or tenants. Because symptoms of rodenticide poisoning may develop over a few days, pet owners are sometimes unaware that their pet has ingested the poison until it is almost too late. The cost of veterinary care to treat an animal who has ingested rat poison can exceed \$2,000 and take weeks of supportive care and medication, putting a significant financial and emotional strain on families. The alternative to this expensive care is euthanasia, which is a heartbreaking result of a preventable situation. These situations could be avoidable if homeowners and landlords had more information about the poisons being used in or near their homes, or were given other options, such as IPM, by pest control companies.



¹ Maureen Murray "Anticoagulant Rodenticide Exposure and Toxicosis in Four Species of Birds of Prey Presented to a Wildlife Clinic in Massachusetts, 2006–2010," Journal of Zoo and Wildlife Medicine, 42(1), 88-97, (1 March 2011)

² Murray, M. Anticoagulant rodenticide exposure and toxicosis in four species of birds of prey in Massachusetts, USA, 2012–2016, in relation to use of rodenticides by pest management professionals. *Ecotoxicology* 26, 1041–1050 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10646-017-1832-1>