

NEW EU REGULATION THREATENS EVEN GREATER UK RAT AND MOUSE PROBLEMS, REVEALS INDUSTRY REPORT

New regulations coming before the European Parliament this summer threaten to leave the UK virtually defenceless against surging populations of rats and mice only just being kept in check by current control measures.

This is the worrying situation revealed by the National Pest Technicians Association (NPTA) in its latest national rodent survey report published this week (Monday, March 29).

“Our tenth annual survey confirms we’re on a knife edge in keeping on top of rat and mouse populations across the country,” explains NPTA chairman, Peter Crowden.

“The new regulations being proposed by the EU would tip the balance in an almost unimaginable way by banning the rodenticides we rely on for the overwhelming majority of current UK control. “Not least because none of the very few alternatives provide anywhere near equivalent levels of rat and mouse control and all have major practical or, in the case of hydrogen cyanide and phosphene, safety limitations to their use.

“To lose anticoagulant rodenticides would be a disaster for efforts to safeguard both UK public and animal health,” he stresses. “It would also raise particular dangers for the safety of much of our food and the quality of many our lives.

“These active ingredients are currently used in virtually every one of the 465,000 annual rat and mouse treatments reported by the local authorities responding to our latest annual survey, not to mention the vast majority of those undertaken each year by pest control professionals in private practice and householders.”

As well as under-lining the scale of continuing local authority-organised rodenticide treatments, the NPTA’s 2008/9 survey report highlights the fine line the country is treading in keeping the lid on rat and mouse infestations.

While reported treatments show a welcome fall from the previous year’s record level overall, both London and the Midlands recorded double digit year-on-year increases in rat treatments – almost 40% up on 2007/8 in the case of the capital.

Equally, the Association’s analysis of comparative figures for the past decade suggests total local authority treatments are at an almost identical level to 10 years ago, with regular surges every two to three years.

“Even with the highly effective rodenticides currently available to the industry, we are clearly only just keeping rats and mice at bay,” observed Peter Crowden.

“What’s more, we know the progressive withdrawal of free rodent control services over the past 10 years time has caused an increasing number of infestations to be excluded from local authority reporting each year. So the real scale of the national problem has almost certainly grown very substantially in this time.

“Sadly, our survey confirms that only a minority of local authorities are currently providing rodent control services completely free of charge – around four in every 10 in the case of rats and half this number with house mice.

“However, it also shows the majority are still providing free services to some groups of residents and over three quarters retain their own direct control capacity. Heartening too is the fact that, despite intensive budgetary pressures, around one in every 10 of those currently offering free services has re-introduced them having previously charged

“Enlightened local authorities like these are setting a hugely valuable example for the majority in living up to one of their most important statutory responsibilities,” he notes. “They are to be highly commended for taking determined action to minimise the serious public health implications of rats and mice, let alone the food wastage, damage and nuisance they cause.”

Peter Crowden urges local authority and private sector pest controllers to take a far more co-ordinated, better planned and, above all, less reactive approach to rat and mouse control across the country.

At the same time, he is adamant that policy makers and advisers need to be aware of the extent to which modern lifestyles are increasingly playing into the hands of the rats and mice, and act to address this vital issue by better management of wild bird feeding, domestic waste and home composting, in particular.

“The single most vital thing everyone has to do in the coming few weeks is to persuade EU policy makers of the critical importance of not excluding anti-coagulant rodenticides from continued use throughout Europe,” he concludes. “Fail to do this and it would not be exaggerating to say we can give up the idea of any effective rat and mouse control in most situations for the foreseeable future.”