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Rabbit control: fumigation

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Fumigation for rabbit control involves the introduction of poisonous gas into a warren. It is one of the best control methods to use where low numbers of rabbits live in a few widely scattered warrens. The threat to non-target animals is minimal. This factsheet should be read in conjunction with registered product labels and directions for use.

Check the Department of Health, Western Australia website (health.wa.gov.au) for public health requirements for the use of phosphine fumigation.

Be careful with phosphine

Phosphine is lethal to all forms of life.

Read the label and carefully follow the manufacturer's instructions. Phosphine is extremely dangerous in enclosed spaces, such as vehicle cabins.

Always open the phosphine container in the open air — not in a shed or the car. Stand upwind of the container and hold it away from your face when opening or applying the tablets.

Never open the container close to flammable materials.

Personal protection

Wear PVC gloves and breathing protection (that is, a combined dust and gas cartridge and respirator). After using phosphine, wash your hands

When to use fumigation

Fumigation may be used in areas where access is limited, such as fence lines, around trees, and on riverbanks, but it may be difficult to find and seal all warren entrances in these situations.

Fumigation can be carried out at any time of year but has the best long-term effect if done shortly before the start of rabbit breeding season. Fumigation is not suitable when most of the rabbits are living above-ground rather than in warrens, such as in areas of scrub where there is a dense understorey, especially in coastal districts.

Fumigation can be used effectively in the following situations:

- as a follow-up technique to poisoning and warren ripping
- for spot treatment of small, isolated rabbit infestations
- where ripping is undesirable due to the risk of soil erosion or damage to conservation areas
- where the poisons 1080 (sodium fluoroacetate) and pindone cannot be used due to the risk to non-target species, or where poison baits are unwanted
- when the rabbit distribution has declined under temporary harsh climatic conditions and rabbits are surviving in a few isolated pockets.



Who can purchase and use phosphide tablets for rabbit fumigation?

Phosphine generating products are produced under several brand names and are available to primary producers from S7 rural merchandise suppliers.

Fumigation may be undertaken by a licensed pest management technician (LPMT) who has the necessary qualification (that is, Certificate III in Rural and Environmental Pest Management), and pest industry licence and registration by the WA Department of Health (health.wa.gov.au).

- Phosphide tablets for rabbit control can be purchased from S7 retailers by primary producers.
- Accessing phosphide tablets is not permitted unless you are a primary producer (that is, a farmer, horticulturalist, vineyardist, or orchardist. However, there is no single definition of a primary producer, so the sale of phosphide tablets is largely at the discretion of the retailer.

Image 1: Fumigating a rabbit warren

- Ensure the LPMT has the necessary training and certification to conduct fumigation using phosphide tablets. Licensed pest management technicians (LPMT) may vary in their experience and use of phosphide tablets.
- Rabbit warren fumigation may be undertaken in the following circumstances, provided it is carried out safely and according to best practice:
 - a person on their own property
 - a business employee on business land
 - a person on a friend or family member's property, free of charge (receiving wages does not count).
- If someone wishes to take money for fumigation work (for example, provide a service for a paying customer), they must be a licenced pest management technician.

Static fumigation

Static fumigation is done by placing a fumigant tablet down each warren entrance. The main fumigant, phosphine, is released from aluminium phosphide tablets by reaction with moisture.

For phosphine fumigation to work effectively, the gas must build up quickly to lethal concentration throughout the warren. This will not happen if the gas is released slowly from the tablet because rabbits may have time to dig their way out. The speed of release of phosphine depends on the amount of moisture the tablet contacts. To ensure fast phosphine production, always wrap the tablets in moist paper immediately before putting them in the warren.

The use of chloropicrin has been discontinued due to environmental and human safety concerns, and it is highly inhumane.

Method of application

1. Make enough noise, or work the area with dogs, to encourage rabbits to go underground.
2. Cut around the rabbit warren hole to provide adequate depth for the soil plug to close the opening (step 4).
3. While wearing PVC gloves, place one or 2 aluminium phosphide tablets wrapped in moist paper at least 60 cm down a tunnel.
4. Place a ball of crumpled paper down the opening to prevent loose dirt from covering the fumigant tablets. Block the entrance with a mallee root or similar.
5. Fill the opening with soil and trample it to give a good seal.
6. Repeat steps 2 to 4 until all warren entrances are sealed.
7. Inspect the warrens one week after treatment and retreat, if necessary.

Safety

Always start downwind and work your way into the wind to avoid accidentally inhaling any gas.

First aid

If poisoning occurs, contact a doctor or the Poisons Information Centre (call 131 126). Do not give direct mouth to mouth resuscitation if swallowed. To protect rescuer, use Air-viva, Oxy-viva, or one-way mask. Resuscitate in a well-ventilated area.

More information

Refer to the website at dpird.wa.gov.au for more information on European rabbits, rabbit control, and Registered pesticide permits.

Contact us

Pest and Disease Information Service (PaDIS)

+61 8 9368 3080 | [Email PaDIS](mailto:padis@dpird.wa.gov.au) (padis@dpird.wa.gov.au)

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