

Guidance on the handling and disposal of dead mice

The use of pesticides to control mice is necessary given the devastating impacts that the mouse plague is having on people, businesses and properties in NSW.

While the risks to human health are low, all pesticide products, as well as dead and dying animals suspected of being poisoned, need to be carefully handled to avoid impacts to human health, other native wildlife, pets and the environment.

1. Safe handling of dead animals

Dead animals should be handled as little as possible.

Wear gloves, clothes that cover bare skin and use a shovel, rake or dustpan to collect dead animals.

As well as the risk of pesticides being present on animals, and in their digestive tracts, mice can carry the bacteria *Leptospirosis*. The bacteria may be present in mice urine and can enter the human body through cuts or abrasions, and occasionally through the lining of the mouth, nose and eyes.

Wearing gloves and clothing that covers exposed skin will help avoid contact with any body fluids and dust from the dead animals.

See the *Staying healthy during a mouse plague* fact sheet for more information:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/mouse-plague.aspx>

After handling dead animals, wash hands with soap and dry with paper towel. Handling of dead mice should not be undertaken by pregnant women or people who are immunosuppressed.

The regular collection and disposal of mice carcasses around homes is highly recommended to limit the activity of scavengers, prevent harm to non-target animals and mitigate the spread of disease.

Urban areas

For residents in urban areas with a council waste collection service, dead mice should be placed in plastic bag(s) and disposed of in the general (red lid) waste bin for removal by your local council. Locate the bin in a cool, shady area away from direct sunlight to limit decomposition and the generation of odours. Secure the bin lid to minimise the risk of scavengers.

Rural settings

For residents living in rural settings who do not have a council waste collection see the options in Section 2 for disposing of dead animals.

Mice that have been poisoned usually retreat to their burrows to die, and where collection of dead mice on-farm is not practical, they can be left *in situ* to decompose.

2. Disposal options

The preferred disposal options for dead mice are:

- disposal via red bin waste collection or disposal to a landfill facility
- onsite burial for areas where there is no red bin service; and open air burning (subject to required approvals and in rural areas with no red bin service only).

2.1 Disposal to landfill

While disposal at an approved landfill site is preferred because these sites have the necessary infrastructure to manage waste, burial of carcasses on rural properties may be appropriate. Burial is often an effective method of disposing of large quantities of dead animals if burial pits are located, constructed and managed correctly.

2.2 On-farm burial – selecting, constructing and managing a burial site

To reduce environmental impacts the location and characteristics of the burial site are very important. An on-farm burial site should be set up as follows:

- on elevated land with a slope of less than 5%
- at least two metres between the water table and the base of the pit
- at least 200 metres from any surface waters (rivers, creeks, dams etc.)
- at least 300 metres from neighbouring houses, buildings or public areas
- on heavier soil of low permeability and good stability
- a safe distance from underground and above-ground infrastructure (e.g. powerlines, telephone line, gas line, water pipes, sewerage)
- well away from the view of the general public.

In situations where the site does not have the characteristics listed above, and where there is a large quantity of animals needing disposal, the burial pit will need to be lined to reduce the likelihood of leachate contaminating the water-table, this would especially be the case for large quantities of mice carcasses.

For more information on lining a burial pit – see page 32 of the AUSVETPLAN *Operational Manual – Disposal* version 3.2 2020:

<https://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/our-publications/ausvetplan-manuals-and-documents/>

Provided the burial location meets the requirements above there are several options:

Shallow burial: Shallow burial involves burying carcasses 30–45 cm deep and incorporating organic matter (hay, straw, wood chips or manure) into the trench and re-covering with soil. The

addition of organic matter has been shown to speed up decomposition. The area can be returned to normal use after several months.

Trench burial: This is a viable option if there is a large quantity of carcasses and machinery is available to dig trenches. Trench width and depth will depend on the type of machinery used and the safety requirements of machinery operators. Contact the Environment Line on 131 555 for advice on trench construction.

2.3 Open-air burning

Burning carcasses, although not preferred, may be the only option available if landfilling is not possible and there are no restrictions on burning due to fire danger.

Sufficient fuel and air flow is required to achieve the hottest fire and efficient combustion. Any open-air burning of mice carcasses must be done in a manner to minimise air pollution and taking into account the potential for smoke to impact with regard to:

1. Wind direction
2. Weather conditions
3. The length of time that the material being burnt is likely to burn
4. Taking reasonable measures to ensure that the material being burnt is not wet; and
5. Burning the minimum volume of fuel necessary to dispose of the carcasses.

Before burning carcasses on-site, consult with your local council and fire brigade to find out the required permits and possible fire bans.

For more information on open-air burning refer to page 37 of the AUSVETPLAN *Operational Manual – Disposal* version 3.2 2020:

<https://www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au/our-publications/ausvetplan-manuals-and-documents/>

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