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Fraudulent Bat Control Outlawed

On 24 April 1984 Wisconsin Governor Anthony Earl signed into law new legislation that "prohibits the sale or advertising of pesticides for bat control purposes" in his state. Hopefully, this example will lead the way to similar legislation, or at least more reasonable policies, everywhere.

Fraudulent pest control practices involving bats are extremely lucrative. Tempted by big profits, companies work hard to keep the public frightened and to reduce government restrictions. Investigation on behalf of the Wisconsin law showed that just one Milwaukee company earned roughly \$350,000 from its bat business in the summer of 1983 and indicated city-wide profits of a million dollars or more. Similar profits are also documented from Baltimore and Minneapolis, with just two-man companies making up to \$250,000 annually from bat control. Such businesses are widespread and not limited to the United States.

The world's foremost authorities on bats and public health agree that these companies' chemical treatments cause problems far worse than those they are supposed to solve. In fact, a federal judge recently found that the most serious health hazards associated with bats were those created by unscrupulous pest control companies. Even the company involved in the federal court decision subsequently expanded its bat control business, simply switching to alternative but still dangerous chemicals.

One of the most commonly used chemicals, Rozol, is especially dangerous. The Rozol label notes that it can be "highly hazardous" if inhaled or absorbed through the skin. Exterminators are warned to protect themselves with gloves and respirators. Yet up to 18 pounds of this deadly powder are often blown into a single attic, where it can easily sift directly into human living quarters.

While the chemical mingles unrecognized with household dust, people are poisoned. Exposure of pregnant women may cause facial deformities in their babies, and tests on animals indicate that Rozol can cause serious injury, and even death, before diagnostic symptoms are detected.

We already know of a chronically injured 3-year-old Minnesota child who was poisoned in her bedroom. The attic above had been treated with Rozol despite the fact that no bats lived there! Her parents had become needlessly frightened when a single bat apparently entered through an open window, and a dishonest company exploited their fear. Other poisoned homeowners, unaware of the danger, are unlikely to be correctly diagnosed.

In June 1980 an Environmental Protection Agency memo urged that all use of Rozol Tracking Powder for bat control be canceled. Nevertheless, by 1982, 20 states (Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming) had begun to permit Rozol use against bats. Without widespread public outcry, well funded pesticide and pest control company lobbyists will continue to lengthen this list. In the meantime, human health is seriously

threatened.

In Wisconsin, bat treatments included the fumigation of thousands of homes with methyl bromide. Human contact with this chemical is extremely dangerous. All toxic chemical experts contacted were appalled to hear of its use near people. The Chairman of the Wisconsin Agriculture Board reported that his best friend had become a "human vegetable" as a result of a single accidental exposure to methyl bromide. Some experts also pointed out that methyl bromide is capable of dissolving insulation from electrical wiring, creating potentially serious fire hazards.

A variety of additional chemicals, including DDT, are legally used against U.S. bats. Others are exported to developing countries around the world for similar use, sometimes without the slightest warning about their dangers to people. Tests show that none of these chemicals is effective in controlling house bats and that most are clearly counter-productive. Their continued use constitutes a clear case of consumer fraud. Tens of thousands of new families are threatened each year, and profits from such business are used to fuel anti-bat sentiment world-wide.

Special Thanks: This bill could not have been passed without the dedicated assistance of many experts and volunteers. We especially thank Carol Luetkens, Executive Secretary, Madison Audubon Society, and Caryl Terrel, Legislative Coordinator, Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter, for their expert advice and tireless lobbying efforts. Representative Tom Crawford (D.) and Senator Rod Johnston (R.) cosponsored the bill, and Representative Crawford and Senator Strohl (D.) were especially helpful in getting the bill passed. We also thank Stephen Kern of BCI and Pat Morton of the Sierra Club, as well as many representatives, senators and members of the news media whose influence were of crucial importance.

(Editor's Note: BCI has prepared a useful information packet for those interested in introducing similar legislation elsewhere. This includes an outline of procedures and probable obstacles, supportive documentation and advice based on our experience. A \$5 contribution to cover duplication and mailing costs would be appreciated.)



Looking on as Governor Earl signs Assembly Bill 630 into law are. (l. to r.) Stephen Kern, former Secretary/Treasurer of BCI, Carol Luetkens, Executive Secretary Madison Audubon

Society, Sharon Clark-Gafkill, Vice-President Madison Audubon Society, and Heidi Zogg, Secretary/Treasurer of BCI, Photo courtesy Madison Audubon Society.

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