



NEWS RELEASE

United States Department of Agriculture • Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service • Legislative and Public Affairs
4700 River Road, Riverdale, MD 20737-1232 • Voice (301) 734-7799 • Web: <http://www.aphis.usda.gov>

Contacts:
Gail Keirn (970) 266-6007
Carol Bannerman (301) 734-6464

USDA Begins Field Trial to Test a Canadian Oral Rabies Vaccine in Raccoons and Skunks

WASHINGTON, Sept. 14, 2011--Beginning on or around Sept. 15, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) Wildlife Services (WS) program will distribute approximately 80,000 oral rabies vaccination (ORV) baits in West Virginia to test the safety and efficacy of the ONRAB[®] (Artemis Technologies, Guelph, Ontario, Canada) vaccine for potential use with the raccoon and striped skunk. Although the ONRAB[®] vaccine is currently used in Canada to control rabies in raccoons and skunks, this is the first time the vaccine has been field tested in the United States.

APHIS works cooperatively with local, state and federal governments, universities and other partners to reduce the prevalence of rabies in wildlife by distributing ORV baits in targeted areas. While the bait currently used in ORV programs has proven to be effective in raccoons, coyotes and foxes, it does not produce detectable levels of rabies antibodies in striped skunks.

"Skunks infected with the raccoon rabies virus may help to perpetuate and maintain the virus in the environment," said Dennis Slate, the coordinator for APHIS' national rabies management program. "If the ONRAB[®] bait can successfully vaccinate skunks and raccoons, as well as foxes and coyotes, it could greatly enhance the effectiveness of our ORV programs."

Previous use of ONRAB[®] in Canada has demonstrated its effectiveness in raccoons and skunks under specific bait distribution patterns. In a Canadian-U.S. border study comparing oral rabies vaccines currently used in each country, ONRAB produced a greater than 70 percent vaccination rate in raccoons compared to 30 percent for the vaccine used in the United States. The ONRAB[®] vaccine field trial will take place within a 559-square mile area spanning portions of Greenbrier, Summers and Monroe counties in southeastern West Virginia. The field trial is a collaborative effort between APHIS, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the vaccine manufacturer (Artemis Inc.), the West Virginia Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Resources and the West Virginia Division of National Resources. APHIS personnel will sample skunks and raccoons in the study area both prior to and immediately following bait distribution to determine vaccination rates.

The ONRAB[®] bait consists of a polyvinyl chloride (PVC) blister pack, containing the vaccine. To make the baits attractive, the blister packs containing the vaccine are coated with a sweet attractant that includes vegetable-based fats, wax, icing sugar, vegetable oil, artificial marshmallow flavor and dark-green food-grade dye. Humans and pets cannot get rabies from contact with the bait, but are asked to leave the bait undisturbed if they encounter it. Should contact with bait occur, immediately rinse the contact area with warm water and soap and call the telephone number listed on the bait for further instructions and referral.

The cooperative WS National Rabies Management Program was formed in 1995 to prevent the further spread of wildlife rabies in the United States by containing and eliminating the virus in terrestrial mammals and targets raccoon variant, canine variant in coyotes and a unique variant of gray fox rabies.

Rabies is a serious public health concern because if left untreated it is always fatal. Costs associated with detection, prevention and control of rabies exceeds \$300 million annually. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 90 percent of reported rabies cases in the United States are in wildlife.

For additional information concerning rabies or the ORV program, please visit www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/oral_rabies/index.shtml or contact WS toll free at 1-866-4-USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297).

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