

SAFE USE OF PEST CONTROL PRODUCTS THAT CONTAIN NAPHTHALENE

Public health information about the proper use of naphthalene-containing products for pest control, including as a snake repellent.

If you are concerned about mothball or naphthalene poisoning, contact the Georgia Poison Center 1-800-222-1222.

What is the proper way to use naphthalene?

It is important to follow the label instructions for any pest control product. Under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act, it is a violation of the law to use a pesticide in a way that is inconsistent with the label instructions. Following label instructions is critical for the health and safety of people, pets, and the environment.

Manufacturers specify how these products can be used. Mothballs, for example, are a regulated pest control product containing naphthalene that is often used in inappropriate places such as inside attics, crawl spaces, gardens, trash cans, vehicles, or on the lawn in an effort to control some pests other than moths that damage clothing. Mothballs are a registered pesticide, and it is illegal to use them in locations that are not specified on the label.



What is naphthalene?

The chemical naphthalene is an effective pesticide and pest repellent found in some pest control products. These products are regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Each product containing naphthalene is registered for very specific indoor and outdoor residential uses. Indoors, it is used in mothballs to kill clothing moths and their eggs. Outdoors, it is used around gardens and buildings to repel snakes and other wildlife.

Can naphthalene affect my health?

Yes, naphthalene is a poison. Adults, children, and pets can be exposed to naphthalene by breathing, eating, drinking, or touching naphthalene. Exposure to large amounts of naphthalene can destroy red blood cells, which is called hemolytic anemia. Most accidental exposure to naphthalene occurs by inhaling the fumes. Breathing high levels of naphthalene can make you feel light-headed, dizzy, tired, or sick to your stomach. Repeated exposure for many years has been linked to kidney damage, and possibly cancer.

Eating naphthalene-containing products such as mothballs can cause bloody urine or feces. Most cases of mothball poisonings among children occur because mothballs can be mistaken for candy. Wearing clothes, diapers or using blankets that have absorbed naphthalene can cause skin irritation, especially in children.

In addition, using mothballs and other pesticides incorrectly outside can harm pets and other animals, and can also contaminate soil, plants, and water.

Is there a safer way to control pests?

Yes. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a way of solving pest problems by using all we know about pests against them. IPM takes advantage of appropriate pest management options including limited use of toxic chemical pesticides, species-specific chemicals, biological pest control, and trapping. IPM relies heavily on knowing when pest populations or environmental conditions require that pest control action must be taken. For example, using repellants may be helpful for controlling some species, while eliminating the food or water sources might be necessary for others.

What can I do to keep snakes away from my property?

In Georgia there are 41 snake species, but only six are poisonous. Not all snakes are a threat to humans, and snakes play an important role in the Georgia ecosystem. They help control the rodent population, and some non-venomous snakes even eat poisonous species! In Georgia, killing indigenous (native) snakes is against the law.

Many snakes prefer to be under cover or underground. Some snakes can get into backyards, gardens, barns, or crawlspaces. There are a few simple things you can do to prevent snakes from getting onto your property:



- Keep the lawn cut low and free of leaves. Snakes need cover to hunt and protect themselves.
- For the same reason, clear wood and brush piles.
- Rid your property of rodents – the snake’s main food source.
- Repair cracks along your home’s foundation and fill holes around pipes. Snakes only need a ¼ inch opening to get inside.
- For some homeowners, a solid fence installed around family gathering areas, or other areas for children and pets, may be helpful to prevent snakes from entering.

For more information about protecting your home from snakes, contact your county University of Georgia Cooperative Extension office.

REMEMBER

- Naphthalene is a chemical found in mothballs and commonly used as a pesticide and snake repellant
- Follow the instructions provided on the product label
- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a comprehensive approach to pest control that emphasizes environmental responsibility and reducing the use of chemical pesticides
- Simple changes around the home, such as yard maintenance and installing a fence, can prevent or repel snakes without the use of chemicals

For More Information

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Chemical Hazards Program
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(404) 657-6534
www.dph.ga.gov/chemical-hazards**

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