Press release: Restrictions on the use of metaldehyde to protect wildlife

A ban on the outdoor use of metaldehyde, a pesticide used to control slugs in a range of crops and in gardens, is to be introduced across Great Britain from Spring 2020, the Environment Secretary announced today (19 December).

The decision to prohibit the use of metaldehyde, except in permanent greenhouses, follows advice from the UK Expert Committee on Pesticides (ECP) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) that metaldehyde poses an unacceptable risk to birds and mammals.

Slugs can cause significant damage to plants and crops, particularly potatoes, cereals and oil seed rape. However, there are other ways to mitigate their impact through soil preparation. For example, sowing the seed deeper into the soil may prevent the slugs from reaching them. There are also alternative pesticides containing ferric phosphate which provide effective control of slugs and snails without carrying the same risks to wildlife.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

> I recognise that significant effort has been put into encouraging growers and gardeners to use this pesticide responsibly by the Metaldehyde Stewardship Group. However, the advice is clear that the risks to wildlife are simply too great — and we must all play our part in helping to protect the environment.
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> I encourage companies and growers to look at the alternatives, such as ferric phosphate, which is authorised and does not carry similar risks.

The outdoor use of metaldehyde will be phased out over 18 months to give growers time to adjust to other methods of slug control. It will be legal to sell metaldehyde products for outdoor use for the next six months, with use of the products then allowed for a further 12 months.

The new restrictions on metaldehyde will also reduce the possibility of the pesticide contaminating drinking water sources. Although this was not a factor in the advice from ECP and HSE, the restrictions will help water companies continue to meet our robust drinking water standards.