
Wanted: dead shrews

WUR needs shrews for a study of exposure to rodenticides.

Rodenticides are chemical products used to control rodents. In the Netherlands, the products are used outdoors to tackle the brown rat and black rat, explains toxicologist Nico van den Brink. 'As a last resort if other measures, such as removing food and shelter or catching them with traps, don't work.' But shrews can also unintentionally be exposed to the rodenticides. To find out how often that happens, Van den Brink

is calling on the aid of the general public. Anyone who finds a dead shrew is asked to send it in to one of the dozens of collection points around the country

'If these chemicals are found in the shrew, that is a sign of local use'

(see www.zoogdiervereniging.nl). Rodenticides can only be applied by certified users and are subject to strict procedures aimed at reducing their use.

The researcher hopes his study will show how effective this is. 'In particular, I want to see whether there are differences in the use between farming areas and cities.'

The shrew – an insectivore, not a rodent – is being used as an indicator for that use. Shrews live outdoors and have a relatively small habitat. Van den Brink: 'So if chemicals are found in the shrew, that is a sign of local use.' Dozens of shrews have already been sent in to Wageningen. ^{RK}