

KEY FACTS ABOUT POSSUM CONTROL OPERATIONS ON THE OTAGO PENINSULA

What's happening?

Possum Control Operations will be happening from March 2011 onwards to help protect and enhance the Otago Peninsula's biodiversity. Biodiversity is the existence of a wide variety of plants and animals and is a measure of the health of an environment.

Where is it happening?

Over time possum control will occur on all land on the Otago Peninsula, from the suburbs of Shiel Hill, Andersons Bay, Waverley north to the tip of the Peninsula at Taiaroa Head. The initial operation will occur in Sector 1 (Cape Saunders), Sector 2 (Taiaroa Head) and Sector 3 (Clarks/Sheppards Hill), followed by work in Sectors 4 (Peninsula South) and 5 (Urban Buffer).

Who will carry out the possum control?

Professional, industry-certified, Otago-based Contractors over the majority of land, aided by landholder/ resident self-help trapping programmes and volunteers in urban areas.

What control methods are being used?

Due to the varied nature and land use of the area a variety of ground possum control methods will be utilised. The following methods will be used depending on the terrain, available habitat and proximity of urban housing-



Feratox Pellets (5mm diameter)

- (1) Feratox:** Poison bait stations/bait bags will contain Feratox. This is a small 'pellet' (small pea sized) containing enough cyanide to kill one possum. The small green pill will be encased in green dyed peanut paste placed in either a plastic bait station or a small blue paper bait bag. Bait bags are labelled as containing poison and are stapled to trees or small objects in possum habitat. Feratox is not used around urban areas/ residential properties.

Feratox pellets can also be placed in 'Strikers'- a bait station made from potato starch which holds peanut paste and the toxic pellets. All feratox baits not eaten by possums will be retrieved.



Bait Bag (135mm by 75mm)



Striker Bait Station



Cyanide Paste placed on flour on moss

- (2) **Cyanide:** Cyanide can be used in paste form. Small pea-sized baits are generally located on ground spits (overturned grass divot) or on sites that allow ease of application.

These are usually tree stumps or roots, logs lying on the ground or rocks. Cyanide paste can only be used in areas where there is no stock present.

All cyanide baits are removed following treatment of a particular block or area.



Leg hold Trap

- (3) **Leg hold traps:** Traps are set in areas away from domestic animals in habitat where possums live. They are firmly attached to trees/ fence posts and other suitable sites using fencing staples or wire.

Trap sites are lured with a 'blaze'- a mixture of flour and flavoured oils (like cloves, rose, cinnamon, raspberry, garlic, icing sugar) smeared up the trunk of the tree.

Leg hold traps are checked daily as soon as practicable after sunrise.



Timms Kill Trap

- (4) **Timms Traps:** Timms are kill traps designed specifically for possums. They are a "yellow box" which is baited with fruit (apple quarters) and also lures (as above for leg hold traps). When these traps are set it is important that fingers and hands are kept well clear due to the unforgiving nature of the spring loaded kill bar.

Timms are usually placed on the ground along "pad runs" or near possums favourite trees and secured with pegs placed firmly into the ground.

As Timms Traps are a kill trap they do not have to be checked daily.



Sentinel Trap

- (5) **Sentinel/Warrior Traps:** These are metal kill traps set on the trunk of trees. Usually placed well above children's head height.



Warrior Trap



Live capture trap

Live Capture Cage Trap

- (6) **Cage Traps:** Cage Traps are for the live capture of possums and these are used around houses in rural and urban areas. If other animals are inadvertently caught they are easily released unscathed.

It is important that animals caught in these traps are not harassed.

A blanket or towel can be placed over the animal in the cage to greatly reduce stress levels until the possum is killed by the contractor or the non-target animal is freed.

Possums may actually go to sleep if covered over.



Talon Pellets
(size about half your thumb)

- (7) **Brodifacoum:** (Talon/Pestoff) is an anticoagulant poison that is suitable for use in bait stations. This is a frequently used 'over the counter' product. Different talon baits are commonly used for rat and mice control.



Sentry Bait Station with Talon



KK Bait Station



Cholecalciferol Bait Station

- (8) **Cholecalciferol:** (Campaign/ No Possums) is a Vitamin D compound that elevates calcium levels and causes heart failure in possums who ingest the bait.

It is used in bait stations in the form of a soft gel bait.

This is also a frequently used 'over the counter product'.

- (9) **Night shooting:** Night shooting is used as a follow up tool once possum numbers have been knocked down.

It generally occurs with the use of quad bikes and spotlighting.

All night shooting operations will be notified to the police.

- (10) **Indicator Dogs:** Dogs can be used by contractors to find possums that are trap or bait shy. They are especially useful in urban residential environments for finding possums denning in gardens, sheds, roof spaces etc.



Wax Tags (\$1 Coin for scale)

- (11) **Wax Tags:** Consist of a wax block attached to a plastic tag that can be nailed to a tree. It is used as a monitoring tool to determine the presence of possums from tooth marks that are left in the wax. Bite marks are species specific, possum bite marks can be distinguished from non-target animals such as rats. Tags can be placed anywhere and if a possum is detected then traps or bait stations can be placed in the vicinity of the tag.

Why are we using these particular methods?

These methods have proven to work extremely well for possum control operations. They are specifically targeted for possums and when used according to regulations have been proven to be extremely safe. Appropriate control methods for each individual property will be used.

What do toxic baits look like?

All toxic baits are dyed green

What do you need to know about these pesticides?

When using pesticides, there is a poisoning risk, to humans and domestic animals. However these risks are strictly controlled with proper use and operator's adherence to regulations.

Areas that have been poisoned will be clearly signposted.

Townships and urban environments will not be subject to poisoning with feratox (cyanide) and cyanide paste.

Poisoning will occur if people eat poisonous baits.

Dogs will be poisoned if they eat enough bait. 1 feratox pellet is designed to kill 1 possum up to 6kg in weight.

For dogs there is a very low risk of secondary poisoning with Feratox (dogs eating possum carcasses).

All poison will be removed from each property once it has done its job.

What special precautions are needed to keep dogs safe?

There is a very low risk of dogs being poisoned, they are most at risk when they are allowed to roam unsupervised and scavenge possum carcasses. (All possum carcasses will be picked up and disposed off throughout the course of the operation).

People need to keep dogs on leads when walking in a poisoned area.

Keep your dog secured on your property when you are not at home.

If your dog eats a dead possum or bait, make the dog vomit using washing crystals then take to a vet as soon as possible.

How will we know if the operation has achieved its goals?

As soon as the contractor has finished the 'control operation', an independent person will carry out post-operational 'monitoring'. This involves trapping to a standard nation-wide protocol on randomly selected 'trap lines' throughout the 3 Sectors.

Vegetation monitoring will be instigated on selected sites throughout the Peninsula using proven scientific methods to measure vegetation changes. 12 bird monitoring transects have also been established on the Peninsula to gauge any increase in bird populations due to improved habitat resulting from the possum control programme.

General warning!

1. **Do not touch any of the poison baits or bait stations.**
2. **Do not touch any of the traps.**
3. **Do not touch any of the poisoned possum carcasses.**
4. **Keep all pets under control; do not let dogs eat poisoned carcasses.**
5. **Do not let young children into the area unattended.**
6. **Tell any visitors to the area of the danger.**
7. **All areas will have poison signs in place at the time of poisoning.**
8. **Leave trapped possums alone so they can be humanely killed by Contractors.**

What do I do if I suspect poisoning?

In the case of poisoning, always contact your:

- local doctor or local medical centre; or
- National Poisons Centre (phone 0800 764 766)

Regulations

Possum control is governed by many different acts and regulations with the main ones being:

- Biosecurity Act 1993
- Pesticides (Vertebrate Pest Control) Regulations 1983
- Animal Welfare Act 1991
- Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996

Who do I contact for more information?

Richard Wilson (Project Manager, OPBG) 03 455 1590
027 643 4484

Irene Scurr (Chairperson, OPBG) 03 454 61978
021 188 9807

www.pestfreepeninsula.org.nz Email: obpg@xtra.co.nz

Please note: All care and responsibility has been taken to contact all landholders in this operation. If you lease land in the area to someone who lives outside the operational area, or know of a neighbour who has not received this fact sheet and would like more information, could you please pass the details onto Richard Wilson, Project Manager on 455 1590 or 027 643 4484.



*Possum and rat raiding and eating chicks out of a thrush nest.
Photo taken by motion activated camera. Nga Manu Reserve.*



Broadleaf tree damaged by possum browsing- Otago Peninsula