

# As rats swarm California cities, Gov. Newsom bans popular poison to protect wildlife

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Credit: AskJoanne/Wikipedia

California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a bill Tuesday that seeks to protect mountain lions and other wildlife from being poisoned by a popular form of pesticide.

The move raises questions about how the state will manage its growing urban rat population, which some experts say is surging due to the spread of homeless camps across California.

Newsom signed Assembly Bill 1788, which bans, with few exceptions, the use of what are known as "second generation anticoagulant rodenticides" until state pesticide regulators develop plans to ensure they're not harmful to wildlife.

Just about every major environmental group supported the bill authored by Assemblyman Richard Bloom, a Santa Monica Democrat. They argued the toxins are being found in often lethal levels in birds of prey and predatory mammals, especially bobcats and [mountain lions](#).

The toxins build up in their systems as the animals consume rodents that are dying from the poisons. Nine in every 10 dead [mountain lions](#) state scientists test have the toxins in their livers.

"By pulling these four highly toxic rat poisons from the hands of pest control operators, California is giving sensitive species like mountain lions a bit of a fighting chance," Debra Chase, chief executive of the Mountain Lion Foundation, said in a written statement..

Pest control companies, the California Chamber of Commerce, apartment management associations and other business groups opposed the bill. They say the poisons are critical to controlling a rat and mouse population that has exploded in some major California cities, often in low-income areas and around homeless camps that have poor sanitation and piles of trash.

In recent years, the megalopolis of Los Angeles County has seen skyrocketing cases of a rodent-borne disease called typhus.

State environment officials last year, meanwhile, faced a major public relations crisis when they announced they planned to set out the poisons to control rats that had taken over the Sacramento CalEPA building courtyard it shares with a daycare center's outdoor playground.

Environmental groups were furious, and in response, the state agreed to use another type of poison.

The building houses the Department of Pesticide Regulation, which in 2014 prohibited the use of the poisons to anyone but state-certified pest control operators.

Newsom signed the bill just weeks after the National Park Service announced that biologists in the Santa Monica Mountains had found a dead mountain [lion](#) and a dead bobcat that had been killed by the poisons.

The cougar was the sixth mountain lion wearing a GPS-tracking collar to die from the poisons in a years-long study in the region.

Rat poisons are part of the reason why state regulators are considering protecting Southern California and Central Coast cougars under the state's Endangered Species Act.

The bill provides some exceptions for the continued use of the poisons on farms, food storage and processing facilities, medical centers, or when needed to keep rodents like the non-native swamp rats called nutria from tearing up levees. A public health official also can order the poison set out to prevent or address a [public health](#) crisis.

Newsom's been an ardent supporter of the state's big cat population over the years. His father, Judge William Newsom, who died in 2018, was a founding board member of the Mountain Lion Foundation.

"My father was a naturalist and a strong advocate for the preservation of mountain lions, and I grew up loving these cats and caring about their well-being," Newsom said Tuesday in a press release. "He would be proud to know that California is taking action to protect mountain lion populations and other wildlife from the toxic effects of rodenticides."

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