Prairie Dog Management and the Use of Rodenticides

The information provided does not override any applicable state or federal laws. Applicators must read, understand and follow the directions for the use of registered rodenticides. It remains the responsibility of the applicator to appropriately select and use products in accordance with licensing requirements, label restrictions and any other applicable state or federal law.

Proper Identification

Gunnison's prairie dog (Cynomys gunnisoni)

Black-tailed prairie dog (Cynomys ludovicianus)

The **Gunnison's prairie dog** (Cynomys gunnisoni) is a yellowish buff color mixed with black above; slightly paler below with a short, white-tipped tail that measures 1.25 to 2.25 inches. It is approximately 12-14 inches in length, between 12-15 inches tall, weighing about 23–42 ounces. On average, males are larger in size than females. Their coats are yellow-toned buff merged with black-colored hairs. The upper head, sides of the cheek, and eyebrows are distinctly darker than the rest of the body. Their tails are mostly white with grayish-white ends and the tips are light gray. A distinguishing physical trait of the prairie dog is the placement of the eyes. They are situated on the sides of their heads, giving them a wide peripheral range of sight.

The **black-tailed prairie dog** (Cynomys ludovicianus), is a rodent of the family Sciuridae found in the Great Plains of North America from about the USA-Canada border to the USA-Mexico border. This yellowish tan to reddish colored rodent is easily identified by its short tail (about one fourth of the total body length) which is black tipped. Adults are from 11 to 13 inches long and weigh 2 to 3 pounds. Unlike some other prairie dogs, these animals do not truly hibernate. The black-tailed prairie dog can be seen above ground in midwinter.

Useful Websites:

- [www.nmda.nmsu.edu/pesticides/private/](http://www.nmda.nmsu.edu/pesticides/private/)
- [www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=1419](http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/pages/publicationD.jsp?publicationId=1419)
1. Consult with Wildlife Agencies
Some prairie dog rodenticides require applicators to contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service prior to beginning the process of application. Applicators should consult with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to determine if federal or state endangered or threatened species or species of special concern may be present in the area proposed for treatment. Please check your state county bulletins for additional restrictions at: www.epa/espp/bulletins.htm

2. Inspect Area Prior to Treatment
Different rodenticides pose different threats to various species. The presence of non-target wildlife species should be considered when selecting the control method. For example, possible risk to grain-eating non-target wildlife may be reduced by using fumigants rather than treated baits when those species are present. Sightings and evidence of the presence of non-target wildlife species can be influenced by time of day, time of year, weather and disturbance. Applicators should take those factors into account when scheduling their site visits. Any additional rodenticide label requirements regarding pre-application site visits must also be complied with, including, but not limited to, any requirement for multiple site visits prior to application. Pre-baiting prior to the use of treated baits provides an additional opportunity for applicators to determine if non-target wildlife species are present. Keep all required records and of sites visited.

Pre-baiting prior to the use of treated baits provides an additional opportunity for applicators to determine if non-target wildlife species are present. A site inspection should include consideration of evidence of the presence and use of burrows by prairie dogs, as well as evidence of the presence of non-target wildlife species such as recent tracks, scat, pellets, feathers, burrow type, calls, etc.

- **Fresh Scat** - Applicators should determine if scat near or in the burrow is that of prairie dogs. Prairie dog scat is 3/4 – 1 1/4" long, light colored to brown, and composed of fresh or dried plant material. If other scat is present, a non-target wildlife species may be using that burrow.
- **Fresh Tracks** - Applicators should determine if tracks near or in the burrow are those of prairie dogs. Wildlife field guides should be used to identify tracks of prairie dogs and non-target wildlife species. If tracks other than prairie dogs are present, non-target wildlife species may be using that burrow.
- **Burrows** - Applicators should determine if the burrow is being actively used by prairie dogs. Prairie dog burrows show dirt mound up around the entrances, 3-5" in diameter with single or multiple entrances.

3. Control Methods
*Burrow fumigants, such as Phostoxin and Fumitoxin* are products that release toxic gases when used in a burrow system. Applicators should not apply prairie dog rodenticide or use a concussive device in any burrow that does not show evidence of active use by prairie dogs. Inactive prairie dog burrows or burrows that show evidence of use by other non-target wildlife species should not be treated by either method.

Aluminum phosphide tablets or pellets are a type of burrow fumigant. These products release phosphine gas in the presence of moisture. Follow label instructions carefully. This is a Restricted Use Pesticide requiring a license to purchase or apply. A fumigant management plan (FMP) and usable template must be completed prior to use, please refer to the website for additional information: www.nmda.nmsu.edu/pesticides/private/

*Toxic grain bait* is most commonly used to control prairie dogs. The effectiveness of poison grain baits is closely associated with the activity and food preference of prairie dogs. Temperature and weather have great influence on activity. For the best bait acceptance, treatment with grain baits should be done before vegetation green-up in the spring or after vegetation has dried up in late summer or early fall. Severe drought or open mild winters also provide good control opportunities.

The ignitable gas cartridge is the most commonly available burrow fumigant. When ignited they produce carbon monoxide, and consume available oxygen in the burrow system. After the fuse is lit, the cartridge is placed well down into the burrow. The burrow opening should then be plugged with sod, sealed with soil, and tamped tightly with a shovel. *Caution should be exercised when using gas cartridges in dry situations since they can be a fire hazard.* Gas cartridges are a General Use Pesticide.

4. Post-Application Site Visit
Applicators should conduct a post-application site inspection of all treated areas to determine efficacy of the treatment for prairie dogs and possible impact to non-target wildlife species. Any take of non-target wildlife species should be reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NMDA.

New Mexico Department of Agriculture
Pesticide Compliance
575-646-2134 or pesticides@nmda.nmsu.edu