

Swindon Borough Council
Pest Control Service
Fact Sheet

MOLES



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The mole (*Talpa europaea*) is a common British mammal and although rarely seen, due to its subterranean existence, its presence is well marked by the appearance of molehills above ground, produced as a result of its underground tunnelling activity. Molehills and tunnels can be a real nuisance in gardens, golf courses, race-courses and other amenity areas.

Moles are territorial creatures, living alone in an extensive network of tunnels covering anything up to 4 acres, in soils suitable for tunnelling. Almost blind but with a good sense of smell, moles feed predominantly on earthworms, which fall into their tunnel systems acting as a pitfall trap. Moles patrol their labyrinth of tunnels on a four hourly cycle. Several young are born every spring but within five to six weeks they move out, over-ground, to establish their own territories.

The only real natural predators of the mole are weasels, however, it would appear that fewer weasels are around as less are being inadvertently trapped. Mole numbers are much higher than before the foot and mouth epidemic and still rising.

Treating a Mole Infestation.

There are predominantly two main methods of controlling moles and each method has its advantages and disadvantages:

- 1 gassing

2 trapping

Gassing

Aluminium phosphide comes formulated as a pellet, which reacts with moisture in the soil and gives off phosphine gas and two products are available on the market at present, Phostex and Talunex.

The suppliers of both these aluminium phosphide products have spent a lot of money and generated a considerable amount of data to ensure continued registration of these products in the market place.

Aluminium phosphide is being supported under the EU Directive 91/414/EEC as a plant protection product, as well as under the Biocides Products Directive 98/8/EC. It is a Schedule 1 poison and operators must be trained and certificated to be able purchase and use it for the control of moles and the manufacturer's recommended guidelines must be followed.

Gassing is a very good method of controlling moles, but you do need to bear in mind where it is being used and it is not ideal for every situation, for example you cannot use it within 10 feet of habituated buildings. Phosphine gas under normal conditions will have been released from the pellet in up to 48 hours and moles will generally have travelled throughout their tunnel network within that time ensuring effective control.

Trapping

Although trapping is regarded by some as old-fashioned it is often regarded as being the cheapest form of control. However, although the traps themselves are relatively cheap, typically under £20, using them is labour intensive. More costly site visits are required and there are frequent losses either from people pulling them up or by them getting dragged down by the mole or damaged by machinery.

There is no legal requirement under the existing legislation to inspect traps set for moles at any specific interval, however, "humanness and efficacy" considerations mean that checks should ideally be made daily and any traps used should kill the mole humanely.

There are two main types of traps that are used, the scissor trap and the half barrel trap, which is derived from the barrel trap developed for mole control some 150 years ago. Live traps can be used but these are cruel to the mole who gets stressed and traumatised and often dies of shock as a result.

Trapping is often preferred, as proof that a mole has been trapped can be demonstrated. Although one mole has been caught, you should be aware that once a run is vacated by a mole, another mole can move into that set of tunnels which may well offer a ready supply of food. Reinfestation can, and frequently does, occur no matter which treatment method is used.

Other methods

Other methods such as sonic devices or repellents have not proven to

be serious alternative control methods, however the vibration generated by a child's plastic windmill pushed into the moles run may be just as effective as an expensive ultrasonic deterrent. Chemical repellents are classified as pesticides and so only those which have been approved for use against moles may be used. Compounds such as creosote, diesel oil and disinfectants do not have approval.

Swindon Borough Council do not treat Moles. You should contact a Private Pest Control Company for treatment. These can be found in the phone book or in the yellow pages.