

Madalyn Letellier

From: Laura Kiesel [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 1:45 PM
To: Public Comments
Subject: code of conduct issues and city councilor
Attachments: Screenshot 2024-03-12 2.58.18 PM (1).png; Gmail - code of conduct violation complaintVoteThemOut.pdf; Gmail - Fwd_ Rodenticide community meeting 1_23 (2).pdf; SPECIAL FEATURE_ MORE POTENT THAN RODENTS – Dig Bos.pdf

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Dear Somerville City Council,

My name is Laura Kiesel. I am the founder of the grassroots group, [Save Arlington Wildlife](#). I have an academic background and an advanced degree in conservation biology/natural resources management. I am also an environmental journalist who has been researching and reporting on the impacts of rodenticides--and particularly, Second Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (SGARs)--for nearly a decade. Some of this reporting includes a 2018 feature article in Dig Boston that offered a very positive portrayal of the City of Somerville's Integrated Pest Management program (see attached PDF of article).

On February 27th, I gave a presentation to the Somerville Rodent Issues Special Committee, at the Committee's invitation (specifically as a favor to Save Somerville Wildlife). I was explicitly informed by Committee Chair and City Councilor Jesse Clingan that he wanted me to cover the same content and information I offered at a public presentation at the Somerville library the month prior hosted by Green & Open Somerville (see PDF of email from Clingan). I was also told I would have about 20 minutes to present, followed by another 10 minutes of Q&A and discussion. As I had another presentation on the topic that same evening starting at 7pm, I informed the Committee I needed to promptly depart the meeting at 6:40pm so I would need to begin my presentation for the Committee as close to 6pm as possible.

The February 27th meeting began late and I did not start presenting until around 6:11pm. About 10-12 minutes into my presentation, Councilor Clingan interrupted to make a comment that he and the Committee weren't interested in hearing a "TED talk." This comment made me feel uncomfortable and gave the distinct impression that Clingan and the Committee were not interested in my perspective (even as I was offering the exact presentation Clingan requested). Toward the end of my presentation, Clingan interrupted again to scold me for referring to some City officials by name in sharing information about public data related to Somerville's Integrated Pest Management program. Clingan told me I was only allowed to refer to city officials by the term "administrator" and asserted by naming officials I was being adversarial. In all my years of heavy involvement in municipal politics, I have never heard of any such rule or etiquette. It seemed that Councilor Clingan was looking for an excuse to find fault with me/my presentation. Shortly after this, as I was nearing the completion of my presentation, Councilor Clingan told me he had heard enough.

At this point, Councilor Clingan made several rude and derogatory comments aimed at me and my presentation. He criticized me for failing to offer an "innovative solution" such as a drug where rats "get high and then die a happy death." When Councilor Clingan said "get high" he swayed his head

slightly from side to side, pantomiming inebriation. After saying the words "happy death," he chuckled. As someone who is the daughter, sibling, and niece of family members with substance abuse disorder who has lost them forever due to addiction and overdose, I was shocked by such callous comments by an elected official.

Councilor Clingan also admitted through this statement that he wanted me to offer him an easy panacea to the city's rodent problem and when I didn't meet this impossible expectation, he felt entitled to publicly belittle me and my presentation. When a Somerville resident chimed in and attempted to offer public comment asserting Clingan was acting dismissively of me, Councilor Clingan threatened to end the meeting and spoke about the importance of his personal feelings. He then went on to say my presentation was "repetitive" and that I "abused" the time the Committee had given me. I attempted to speak again to both briefly defend myself, but also let the Committee know I had to depart the meeting to make my next presentation, but I was refused the opportunity. As such, I left the meeting.

As a wildlife scientist whose academic research once primarily focused on predator-prey population dynamics, the main alternative to SGARs I was promoting in my presentation was creating healthy urban habitats that encourage the flourishing of predator species. A single Great Horned owl can consume 1,500 rats and 4,000 mice a year. By eradicating predators like hawks and owls by secondary rodenticide poisoning, the City of Somerville is actually undermining its own rodent control goals and instead contributing to a perpetual rodent infestation. I offered peer review research to back this theory up, citing studies comparing pilot sites relying on raptor predators versus anticoagulant rodenticides that found the former site experienced far superior rodent control. Yet, Councilor Clingan and his colleagues interpreted my position as (relayed in Clingan's own words) I "think it's sad that critters are dying." The optics of a Committee stacked solely with men dismissing a group of women advocates and summarizing a slide deck by a female biologist filled with scientific studies and facts as simply sentimentalizing wildlife is rife with sexist undertones.

Furthermore, the next day, I was informed by a member of Save Somerville Wildlife that Councilor Clingan called her on the telephone immediately after the meeting, repeatedly asking for my personal phone number, with the intention to call me that evening as well (see screenshot of text message with phone number and some text redacted). Asking a third party for my personal phone number to call me after hours in the evening without my knowledge or consent is wildly inappropriate and unacceptable behavior by a City Councilor. Councilor Clingan clearly does not have an understanding of professional boundaries.

According to [Rule 17 of the City of Somerville's Code of Conduct for City Councilors](#): "*Members shall not act in a disrespectful...manner towards members of the community...Members shall participate and interact in Council and committee meetings with dignity and decorum fitting those who hold a position of public trust.*"

Additionally, Bullet 1. of the [Code of Conduct specific to board, commission, and committee members](#) states: "*Members will strive to appreciate differences in approach and point of view and treat residents, city employees, partner organizations and other board, commission or committee members with courtesy, respect and professionalism*"; Bullet 7 states: "*Members should commit to studying and analyzing the problems and issues that come before them, listen to requests/questions, ask for clarification if necessary, and provide complete, knowledgeable, accurate, precise information regarding inquiries*"; and especially the beginning of Bullet 10: "*....rude or intimidating behavior...will not be tolerated.*"

Councilor Clingan belittled the different policy approach and point of view I was offering. A City Councilor should know there is no such thing as a singular, silver bullet solution to any dilemma and that environmental and public health problems in particular are often complex and require nuanced understandings of, and approaches to, the issue.

Even as the Code of Conduct for City Councilors asserts they "shall not act disrespectfully," I was denied any real recourse. Though City Council President Ben Ewen-Campen was apologetic, he first only suggested I could have a "private chat" with Councilor Clingan. Considering Clingan's public treatment of me, I didn't want to imagine how he might behave in a private conversation. That option also didn't acknowledge this was not an interpersonal difference but one concerning unprofessional behavior. When I pressed further for an option to file a formal grievance, I was informed by Council President Ewen-Campen that "The only true process for holding elected officials accountable is at the ballot box" (see PDF of email). Other than that, the only other option Councilor Ewen-Campen offered to me was to submit this public comment.

Later on, it was clarified to me by the Somerville City Clerk that even though the Code of Conduct for Commissions, Boards, and Committees states that "all" members of "any board, commission, or committee" are subject to its provisions, and outlined series of corrective actions if such standards are violated, that this Code actually **only** applies to commissions, boards and committees appointed by the Mayor. In fact, City Council committees are not subject to a Code of Conduct. In other words, City Councilors are held to lower--or really, no--standards of conduct and are not subject to accountability as are those appointed by the Mayor.

The implication that a City Councilor can treat a member of the public however they feel like and that the only option is to "vote them out" is unsettling. What, then, is the purpose of the above Code of Conduct for City Councilors?

Councilor Clingan's has told the media he apologized to me. I want it clarified on the record that he has not. Many other people, mostly Somerville residents--mainly women--who watched the meeting, have apologized to me and remarked about feeling "horrified," "outraged," and "upset" by Clingan's behavior. But the reactions of Clingan himself and other city officials I have appealed to have been blase at best. Councilor Cligan's additional remarks to the press were dismissive of the harm of his remarks, by claiming the offense he caused was not "intended." As anyone paying attention in recent years to the public dialogues about inclusivity should know, impact is more important than intention. How many sexist, ableist, or racist comments are not consciously intended to be so by the person uttering them? They still do damage and the onus is on the person making the comments (and their superiors/supervisors) to address their problematic behavior. Apologies do not repair damage in the absence of accountability. Actions to correct the problematic behavior are required to achieve more equitable public meetings.

Failure by the City to enforce a Code of Conduct for City Councilors, especially while acting in Committee roles, creates a chilling effect. Such a failure enables and protects City Councilors who act inappropriately and deters members of the public from engaging in open discourse with them and partaking in the democratic process. I, for one, will think twice before ever again accepting an invitation to speak at a City of Somerville public meeting and will never again speak at a City Council Committee meeting unless and until there is a Code of Conduct in place. Others who observed the meeting have confided in me they have reached similar conclusions.

I am requesting that the City Council enforce its own Code of Conduct for City Councilors and rectify the glaring double standard they have for City Council Committees and apply the same Code of Conduct as other boards, commissions, and committees.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Laura Kiesel



Laura Kiesel



code of conduct violation complaint

Ben Ewen-Campen

Thu, Feb 29, 2024 at 8:23 AM

To: Laura Kiesel

Dear Laura,

Thank you for your thorough accounting of the situation. We value the insights of subject area experts in the community, and as Council President I am disheartened to hear that you had a negative experience. However, to address the request for a formal grievance process: elected officials are answerable to the voters. The only true process for holding elected officials accountable is at the ballot box.

With that said, I would be happy to facilitate a conversation with you and the Rodent Issues Special Committee Chair, to include the City Clerk as a neutral party, if you feel that would be useful to address your concerns. Alternatively, you are welcome to submit public comments to the City Council at publiccomments@somervillema.gov in order to have your concerns made public on our next agenda.

I thank you for taking the time to reach out and appreciate all of the work that you have done on SGARs and in the community.

Sincerely, Ben

[Quoted text hidden]

--

[Quoted text hidden]



Laura Kiesel



Fwd: Rodenticide community meeting 1/23

Jesse Clingan

Wed, Feb 7, 2024 at 6:04 PM

To: Renee Scott

Cc: Mary Vrinotis

>, Morgan Pinney

Hi Renee,

Do you have a presentation? I guess I was thinking about whatever content/information that was presented at the meeting at the library.

JESSE CLINGAN - Councilor, WARD 4

[Facebook](#) [X](#) [Website](#)

[Quoted text hidden]



Jesse Clingan called me last night



He's now asking me for your number but I'm happy to tell him I'm not able to provide that- just wanted to confirm that's what i should say.

(617) • Feb 28, 2:45 PM



Type a message



SPECIAL FEATURE: MORE POTENT THAN RODENTS

WRITTEN BY LAURA KIESEL

POSTED MAY 31, 2018

FILED UNDER: FEATURES, NEWS, NEWS+OPINIONS, NON-FICTION

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animals and impacting humans in Mass

The body was found on a chilly morning in early April 2014, lying under a tree, the legs and feathers stiff with rigor mortis. For four years, Ruby the Red-Tailed hawk was a beloved presence in the Fresh Pond section of Cambridge, where she had shared a nest on the seventh-floor ledge of an office building in the middle of the mall with her long-time mate Buzz. A live camera was even set up to record and broadcast their comings and goings over the years. But now she was suddenly and mysteriously dead, and her many fans were wondering what happened.

ADVERTISING

The advertisement for Givebutter promotes fundraising with the text: "Fundraising that's easy, free, and fun." It includes a progress bar showing "\$75,000" and a "Top Videos of Day" section featuring a video titled "Collin Sexton with 20 Points vs. Boston Ce...". The video player shows a basketball game in progress, with a Celtics player (number 30) in the foreground and a Jazz player (number 15) in the background. The scoreboard at the bottom indicates the Celtics are leading 74-57 in the 3rd quarter, with 10:52 remaining.

apartment to travel to a doctor's appointment when I first saw a man dressed in a khaki coverall uniform placing a large number black metal boxes around the apartment complex. As I approached, he straightened up to face me and I asked what they were for.

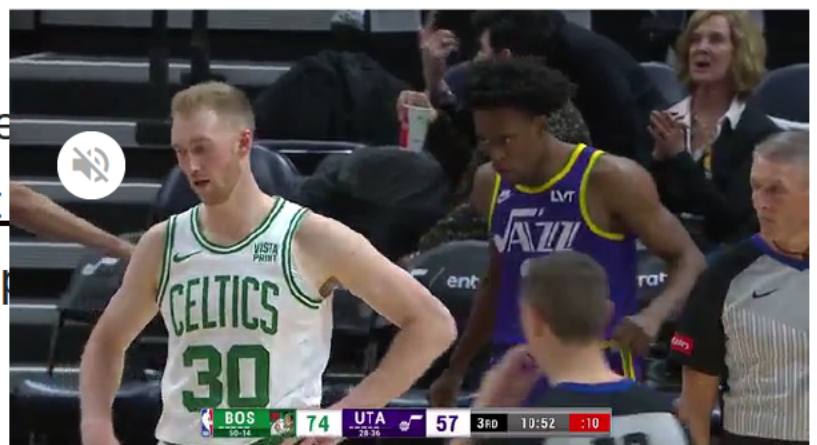
"Rats," he said, placing another one against the backdoor of my own building.

I inquired if there had been any rat sightings in or around the complex recently.

"Not yet," he replied. "This is just a precaution."

My town of Arlington had been a month reconstruction project for rats that businesses and prop

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bait boxes began to proliferate all over town.

As a former natural resource scientist and conservation biologist, I watched anxiously as I knew what was in these boxes: poison. Not just regular poison, but rather a special kind that doesn't quickly kill rats or mice, but instead lingers in their system for days or sometimes a week or more. During that time, whatever eats these poisoned rats—whether cats, or coyotes, or raptor species like hawks and owls—can also become poisoned and can die. This is what had claimed the life of Ruby the Red-Tailed Hawk, as a necropsy performed by Tufts Wildlife Clinic in Grafton showed she had suffered a lethal dose of rat poison after eating too many rodents spiked with laced bait.

It does not appear that Ruby was an isolated incident. Impacts of such poisons have hit many (especially children.

Research reveals rat poisons commonplace in the bloodstr

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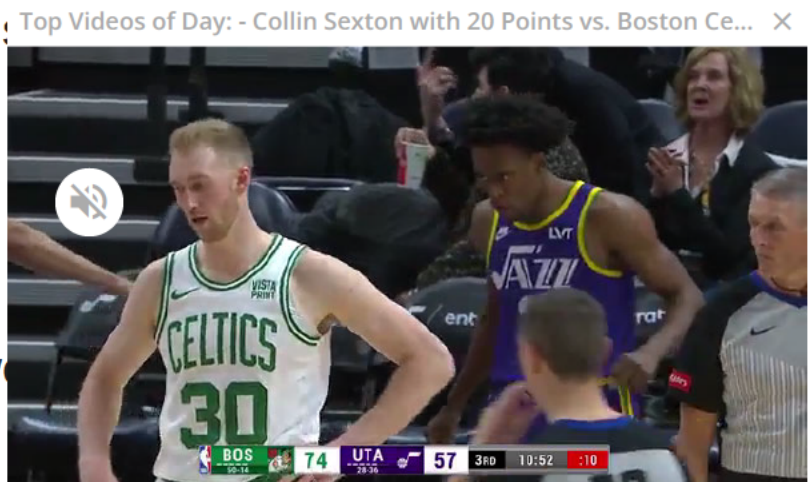


Clinic, between 2006 and 2010, found traces of a particular class of “super” poisons—known as Second Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides, or SGARs—in the liver tissue of up to 86 percent of the Mass-based raptors they tested. In the far reaches of California, rat poison is even killing off threatened bobcat and cougar populations.

Pets can be affected. According to Deputy Director of Advocacy for the Massachusetts Society for the Protection Against Cruelty to Animals Laura Hagen, the MSPCA-Angell veterinary clinic has seen at least 18 cases of suspected or known rodenticide ingestion this year alone.

“The use of rodenticide is especially concerning because it puts both wildlife and companion animals at significant risk of prolonged suffering and death,” Hagen :

The worst part? Despite this unintended repercussions, w



THE BREEDERS

Soon after the anniversary of those first bait boxes being laid down in my complex, I began to notice others in the summer of 2016.

I was sitting on a bench at Spy Pond Park, only two blocks from my home, when a rat suddenly scurried up to my sandaled foot in broad daylight and cocked its head up at me, as if asking for a treat. He scampered away after I made shoo-ing motions, but over the next several minutes, two more approached me and then began to run around the bench in a frolic. In the four years I had lived here and been a daily visitor to the pond, I never once spotted a rat. Now, I see them frequently and they approach me without any fear. They seem to be as much a part of the ecosystem as the ducks that paddle around. More poison in my town has not seemed to resu

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The same year the rats staked their claim on Spy Pond, over in Boston proper, the city's Inspectional Services Department logged more than 3,500 rodent-related complaints in the city—a startling 30 percent increase from the preceding two years. In July 2017, *Governing* magazine placed Boston as number two in the nation for rat sightings and complaints, surpassed only by Philadelphia. Many people have scrambled to identify some of the causes in increased rat activity, which range from warmer winters due to climate change, to less exposure to predators, to more population density (more people equals more trash), to increases in development and construction posited that the widespread urbanization is a contributing factor to exploding rodent numbers beyond.

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this year, the word poison was used multiple times to describe the efforts of Boston officials to manage rats, including phrases such as “buckets of poison,” “a paint bucket full of rat poison,” and “a truck full of poison.” But nowhere in the article are these poisons identified. Nor is there an explanation of how they work, or of their history in the United States.

Most poisons in bait boxes are of the same class that killed Ruby the Red-Tailed Hawk—SGARs that include brodifacoum, bromadiolone, difethialone, and others. These poisons work by interfering with the blood-clotting process. Whatever ingests them, results in internal bleeding that can be fatal. Animals with dangerous bleeding disorders have been found bleeding from the nose and mouth, and some have open wounds.



These poisons, however ironically, may be doing a better job at wiping out some of the most effective predators of rats, while the rats themselves manage to keep rebounding. Experts note that this may be because rats are such rampant breeders—they tend to mate and can even breed year-round, while a single pair of rats can give birth to up to 2,000 babies annually (some estimates even go much higher). By contrast, raptors, like hawks, eagles, and owls, are seasonal breeders who only lay eggs for two to four chicks every spring on average. Simply put, rats outbreed the poison, with the constant presence of bait luring new populations once preceding ones have been eradicated.

“[It] is wasteful and tragic to keep trying to control rats that we have,

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the Solutions (or “RATS”), which was established to educate people about the ecological role raptors play in urban and suburban environments and how they are adversely affected by the widespread use of rat poisons.

In particular, Owens-Viani points to a recent scientific study based in Ventura County, California that found that local hawks and owls were nearly 50 percent more successful in reducing burrowing damage caused by resident rodents as compared to anticoagulant bait stations used at a control site. She also criticizes poisoned bait as perpetuating the infestations they are supposedly designed to deter.

“When you think about the word ‘bait,’ it literally means you are baiting [the rats] into an area and they’re going to keep coming back as long as bait keeps getting put out,” she says. Owens-Viani, whose RATS project recently published a new chapter.

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PERMANENT SGARS

the rat poison.

In 2008, the US Environmental Protection Agency announced it would begin phasing out the availability of over-the-counter SGARs over a three-year period. The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and the manufacturer of the popular over-the-counter SGAR product D-Con, Reckitt Benckiser, balked at the newly proposed restrictions and a lengthy legal battle ensued. They resisted despite reports revealing that more than 10,000 children were accidentally eating SGAR poisons sold over-the-counter annually. Furthermore, the poisonings were disproportionately impacting low income children of color ages four and under. In one case in 2015, 19 inmates at Rikers Island Correctional Facility in New York were sickened due to eating meatloaf that had somehow been tainted with SGARs.

In 2014, Reckitt Benckiser firmly its SGAR-based D-Con items still allow licensed pest control poison in so-called “tamper-resistant” pre-existing inventories of no

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stations are sometimes heavily marketed by some exterminators to their consumers, most of whom are not likely aware of their extensive environmental and public health risks.

In the absence of natural predators, many cities and towns are trying to find out what else can be done to control rats that doesn't include poison. Locally, from 2014 through 2016, the City of Somerville partnered with the corporation Senestech to use a non-lethal bait the latter had developed called ContraPest. As its name suggests, ContraPest significantly lowers the fertility rates of both male and female rats, cutting down on their overall populations. Unlike poisons, the ContraPest bait is quickly metabolized by rats (within minutes of ingestion) and is not stored in their fatty or organ tissue—meaning it does not work its way into the food chain like poisons do. According to Denise Taylor, spokesperson for city of Somerville, pilot studies they conducted found that rodent population growth was suppressed at ContraPest test sites at Truist and respectively.

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resistant” 64-gallon trash carts to every resident in the city free of charge in June 2014. These carts come equipped with secure lids and are made of sturdier material that can better keep rats from accessing the trash inside of them, while also being less prone to blowing over in the wind. The city also implemented rigorous dumpster licensing and inspections guidelines—increasing the number of licensed dumpsters from 177 to 622 in order to ensure they are clean of outside debris and food waste, free of holes and have suitable, tight-fitting lids. In the first 18 months of spearheading this expansive effort, Somerville experienced a 36 percent decrease in rat sightings.

Taylor explains that using Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques that include an array of methods, ranging from better trash management to public education initiatives and innovative technologies like ContraPest, offer the best chance at success in controlling rats.

“All of these approaches worked,” Taylor says. “But we did observe a decrease in rat activity after the simultaneous

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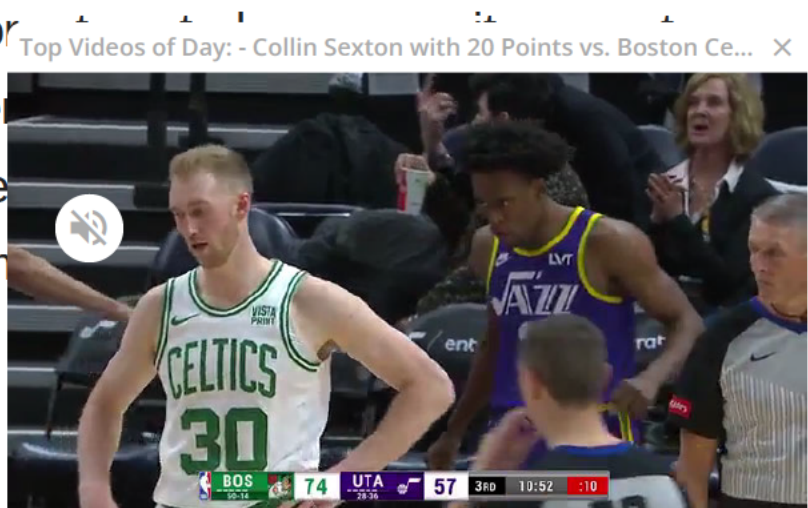
dumpster registration and inspection program which fits with a key approach to successful rodent control: restricting access to food and water sources.”

Currently, Somerville is no longer using ContraPest—which cost \$70,000 to test pilot. While Somerville still uses some SGARs to bait sewers in areas of suspected rodent activity, they’re instead refocusing their program on preventative measures and exclusion. They’re also looking into using dry ice to eradicate specific rat nests and burrows they identify—that is, now that it looks like dry ice is a feasible option.

ICE AGE

In 2016, Boston and several other cities across the US made headlines for using dry ice for

formally registered as a rodent control method. As a result of this public revelation, many municipalities stop using it immediately.

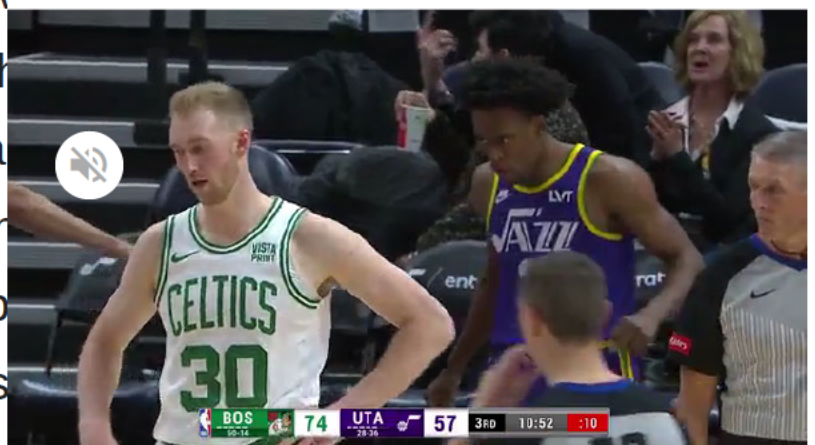


registration of their dry ice product as a rodenticide (aptly known as “Rat Ice”), meaning it can now be legally used to exterminate rats across the US pending state registration and municipal-level approval. Currently, its availability is limited to a handful of major cities, including Boston, though that will likely be quickly expanding in the near future.

Dry ice works to eliminate rat nests by releasing a deadly amount of carbon dioxide fumes into their burrows as the ice melts. Unlike baits with poison or ContraPest, dry ice depends on a more targeted approach, and must be stuffed into confirmed rat burrows that occur only in outdoor settings (dry ice usually can’t be used inside structural dwellings because the CO2 fumes can potentially harm humans).

The extent to which alternative, more comprehensive plans than trash management, will replace I’ve taken the liberty as a cor that would establish an indep investigate the wider impacts

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State Rep. Sean Garballey (D – Arlington) will file it this year.

In the meantime, co-founder of Senestech, Dr. Loretta Mayer, notes that while some newer methods might have larger upfront costs, they can offer lasting benefits in the long term. Overall, she believes that striking a balance between different rodent management methods is key to regaining control over rat populations.

“Rats have been a problem for centuries,” Mayer says. “We all need to listen to one another and work together and with wildlife conservation in mind to make certain well-planned and cautious steps to succeed.”



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LAURA KIESEL

+ posts

Laura has been featured in Politico, the Washington Post, Quartz, Vice, the Atlantic, the Guardian, Salon, and other publications. She covers housing and healthcare for BIN.¹

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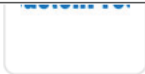
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