



Canadian Veterinary
Medical Association
Association canadienne
des médecins vétérinaires

April 1, 2026

The Honourable Marjorie Michel, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health
Brooke Claxton Building, 7th Floor
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Dear Minister Michel,

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) represents 25,000 veterinary professionals in Canada. The veterinary community is concerned about the recent decision to temporarily lift the ban on the use of strychnine as a control method for Richardson's Ground Squirrels. Strychnine use is widely regarded as an inhumane control method. This decision raises significant animal welfare concerns for both target and non-target species, including livestock, companion animals and other wildlife.

Richardson's ground squirrels are known to cause significant agricultural damage in the Prairies. The CVMA acknowledges the need to control their numbers. However, strychnine's mode of action is associated with adverse welfare outcomes, including extended periods of intense pain, disorientation, and distress prior to death. For these reasons Canada had joined other countries in banning its use.

The recent decision to lift the ban temporarily until November 2027 appears to have been made in response to pressures by the governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan. This action risks undermining progress made toward more humane and evidence-based wildlife and pest management practices and we fear it may lead to the resumption of its use against large predators. The CVMA strongly urges that the ban against access for use in large predators remain in place indefinitely.

Veterinarians have an ethical obligation to advocate for the humane treatment of animals and to minimize unnecessary suffering. The temporary lifting of the ban for Richardson's ground squirrels is therefore a matter of significant concern to us.

The veterinary community respectfully urges the Minister of Health and the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) to:

1. Reaffirm the temporary nature of the decision
Clearly communicate that the lifting of the ban is strictly time limited.
2. Commit to non-extension beyond the agreed-to date of November 2027
Provide assurance that this temporary authorization will not become de facto permanent through repeated extensions.



3. Accelerate humane alternatives
Fast-track the evaluation, approval, and implementation of more humane, evidence-based control methods that minimize animal suffering. These include birth control baits, enhanced raptor habitat and the development of more humane toxins that don't impact non-target species.
4. Enhance transparency
Ensure that comprehensive data on the impacts of strychnine—including effects on both target and non-target species—are collected, analyzed, and made publicly available in a timely and transparent manner.
5. Include regulatory language that clearly limits the use of strychnine to ground squirrels
Describe how strychnine use is to be limited to the species in question and that use in any other species remains illegal.
6. Engage veterinary and other scientific expertise
Involve veterinary professionals and animal welfare scientists in ongoing decision-making processes to ensure welfare considerations remain central.

While the veterinary community recognizes the challenges associated with managing target species, any measure employed must align with contemporary standards of animal welfare. The temporary reauthorization of strychnine represents a step backward in this regard.

We urge Health Canada and the PMRA to uphold its commitment to humane practices by ensuring this measure remains strictly temporary, by prioritizing the development of alternatives, and by maintaining transparency and scientific integrity in its decision-making.

Respectfully,



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President
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