



A mothball mishap?

Lately, Derik had seen a couple of [rats](#) in his basement and heard them running around in his attic during the nighttime. Derik's neighbor advised him to use mothballs to control the rats. As a result, Derik purchased several boxes of mothballs and then scattered them in his basement and attic.

The next morning, Derik's wife, Beverly, woke up and noticed an unusual odor in the house. She told Derik about her concerns the following day when the odor was so strong it was difficult for her to breathe. Subsequently, she developed a headache that would not go away.

Beverly contacted her local [Poison Control Center](#) for emergency medical treatment information. Next, she called [NPIC](#) because she wanted to find out how to reduce the odor in their house.

[Click here](#) to find what Beverly learned from [NPIC](#).



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Beverly learned that their situation could have been avoided if Derik read and followed the [label directions](#) on the [mothball products](#), instead of listening to what his neighbor said. The NPIC Specialist discussed with Beverly that the product Derik used was not [registered](#) by the Environmental Protection Agency to repel or kill rats. Rather, it was intended to kill clothes moths and their eggs and be used only in garment bags, storage closets, and airtight containers.

Beverly learned that mothballs are [pesticides](#) that come in a solid form, but they volatilize—changing slowly into a gas. Mothballs produced in the U.S. contain one of two [active ingredient](#) chemicals: [naphthalene](#) or [paradichlorobenzene](#). Exposure to large quantities of naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene can lead to headaches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or eye and nose irritation and coughing. Furthermore, if exposed for an extended duration, they can lead to more serious effects like liver and kidney damage.

Beverly was interested in learning how she could reduce the gas the mothballs were producing in their home. The NPIC Specialist discussed a number of steps she could consider, including removing the mothballs and ventilating by opening the doors and windows. The label directions instruct users to avoid skin contact with the mothballs. Therefore, it is important that Beverly wear gloves when removing them. To reduce further exposure, Beverly and Derik could leave their home while ventilating and, if needed, use a fan to increase the air circulation. Instructions on how to properly dispose of the mothballs can be found on the label or be provided by contacting a local [household hazardous waste program](#).

The NPIC Specialist reminded Beverly to always [Read the Label First](#) before using a pesticide product in order to determine where it can be used, what pests the product will control, and how to use it correctly.

If someone breathes or ingests a pesticide or gets it on their skin or in their eyes, read the first aid instructions on the product label to determine which steps to take next. Contact your local [Poison Control Center](#) (1-800-222-1222) for emergency medical treatment information or a doctor.

