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Just Killing Rats Isn't Sufficient; You Need Birth Control, Firm Says

By ANN HUGHEY

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

There's a new weapon in the never-ending war against the rat: rat birth control. Gametrics Ltd. in Sausalito, Calif., is selling a compound called Epibloc that it says chemically sterilizes male rats.

The trouble with just killing rats involves a phenomenon called reproductive rebound. When a population is cut back, there's more food to go around and less competition. Survivors are well fed, lively and have more rat pups. The rat population surges back quickly.

If a normal-sized rat eats an entire Epibloc packet, which is about the size of the individual sugar packets in restaurants, it will die. But if a male rat just nibbles on the packet, the company says, scar tissue forms in his reproductive system and blocks his sperm-carrying ducts, without affecting his libido. When a sterile male mates with a female, he doesn't produce offspring, but the female rat goes through a false pregnancy that keeps her out of the mating cycle three times longer than usual.

According to Gametrics, there's another advantage of Epibloc: Super rats have evolved that are resistant to some of the

standard anticoagulant rat poisons, which kill by inducing internal bleeding. Epibloc kills the super rats too.

Ronald J. Ericsson, president of Gametrics, encountered the compound that Epibloc is made from, alpha chlorohydrin, while he was doing research on male contraceptives at Upjohn Co. In some animal species, the compound can act as a temporary anti-fertility drug for the male.

But in large amounts it's also toxic, making it inappropriate for humans. "Some macho redneck in a pickup on a Saturday night might drink a whole bottle of the stuff and that wouldn't be safe," says Mr. Ericsson.

When Upjohn abandoned the notion of using the compound as a human contraceptive, Mr. Ericsson got the patent rights and went into business for himself. Recently, he says, a Saudi group ordered 200,000 Epibloc packets, which sell for about 10 cents each.

In some tests, he says, Epibloc has reduced rat populations by as much as 90%. Although agriculture is a big potential market, it isn't the only one: "I think we'll get a lot of the sewer business," Mr. Ericsson says.

INSIDE:

PEMEX'S former chief denies fraud charges, page 25.

GOODYEAR'S stock climbs on second-half outlook, page 41.

MEATPACKER'S union leader tries to unite group, back page.

Labor Pushed For Early Pick Of '84 Nominee

By ROBERT S. GREENBERG

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WASHINGTON—As the AFL-CIO's executive council prepares to convene in Boston next week, pressure is building to move up the date when the labor federation endorses a 1984 presidential candidate.

Currently, the heads of the AFL-CIO unions plan to meet in December and, for the first time, formally endorse a presidential candidate before the primaries. But former Democratic Vice President Walter Mondale, the leading contender for the endorsement, is pushing hard to have the decision advanced to October. His supporters argue that since he already appears to be organized labor's consensus candidate, an earlier AFL-CIO commitment would enhance labor's effectiveness. Despite a last-minute blitz by Sen. Alan Cranston of California, who also is seeking the endorsement, there doesn't appear to be strong opposition within the labor movement to moving up the date.

"If I had my druthers, I'd go with the blueprint, which is December," says William Winpisinger, president of the Machinists union. "But if the general feeling up in Boston is that we should move it up, I'm not going to get terribly upset by that."

AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland announced two years ago that labor leaders had decided to get into presidential campaigns at an earlier stage to influence the choice of a nominee. Previously, the federation, which usually supports Democrats, withheld its endorsement until the party had chosen its nominee. The policy change reflects labor's discomfort with the past two Democratic candidates, George McGovern and Jimmy Carter, and a belief that its major problems must be solved politically, rather than at the bargaining table.

Formidable Support

Labor says its support for a candidate can be formidable. An AFL-CIO political operative estimates that the federation can set

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MARKETING

American Express Is Gearing New Ad Campaign to Women

By BILL ABRAMS

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

IT'S HARD TO FIND advertising more popular than American Express Co.'s "Do you know me?" campaign. Johnny Carson and "Saturday Night Live" have parodied it affectionately. Hundreds of people have written to American Express and its ad agency asking to be in the ads. Most significantly, in the campaign's nine years on TV, the number of American Express cardholders in the U.S. has quadrupled to 12 million.

Why then is Jerry Welsh, the American Express senior vice president in charge of marketing the card, talking about changing the commercials even as they help bring in record numbers of applicants? "We're trying to redecorate our apartment," he explains, "while the cocktail party is still going on."

The problem is that, after 25 years of pursuing affluent, frequent-traveling businessmen, American Express has won over about 40% of those it considers worthy of its card.

