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## No squirrels allowed, Paso Robles schools say

Paso Robles Public Schools may put an end to its overpopulation of the rodents with a \$2,000 extermination system that involves propane

By Monika Tjia

The Tribune

On any given day, a dozen squirrels scamper on the field at Pat Butler Elementary in Paso Robles, slipping in and out of holes the size of softballs. That may soon end.

The Paso Robles Public Schools is considering buying squirrel extermination systems called the Rodenator Pro for its more than 10 campuses.

The \$2,000 system exterminates the critters by releasing a mixture of propane and oxygen into a hole and lighting a fire. It was demonstrated by a Pinedale, Calif., distributor at Pat Butler Elementary last week.

The school has 90 percent of the squirrel problem in the district, said Ashley Lightfoot, the district's director of business operations. With construction around the school, the squirrels escape to the campus' open field.

The field is used frequently for after-school activities, such as soccer and youth football.

"Every year I get complaints from parents who are concerned" about the holes, Lightfoot said. "We haven't had any broken ankles. ... That's what we're trying to avoid. We don't want to wait until we do."

It's also crucial to control squirrels, Lightfoot said, because the critters can be rabid and carry disease.

In two hours last Thursday, the propane mixture was released in 30 to 50 already-open holes. When ignited, Lightfoot said, it sounded like an M-80.

Nearby resident Mary Golich heard the explosions and doesn't advocate the Rodenator Pro.

"They need to go through that to exterminate squirrels?" Golich asked. "It sounded like an invasion."

The school currently uses gas bombs. The Rodenator Pro has a good track record, Lightfoot said, citing the Fresno School District's report of an 80 percent reduction in squirrels.

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Ashley Lightfoot, Paso Robles school district's director of business operations, examines a ground squirrel burrow at Pat Butler Elementary School.

It is not known how extensively a system like Rodenator Pro is used in the county, said Marty Settevendemie, a deputy agriculture commissioner for the San Luis Obispo County Agriculture Department, explaining that it's not regulated because it's not a pesticide.

Over the next few weeks, school officials will monitor the field. On Friday, Lightfoot examined the area and found three squirrels scurrying around.

If the district board decides to purchase the system, Lightfoot said, it will be used a couple of times a year when school is not in session. Nearby residents will be notified in advance.

Monika Tjia covers the North County for The Tribune. Reach her at [mtjia@thetribune.com](mailto:mtjia@thetribune.com) or 238-2720, ext. 22.