

PRESS RELEASE

September 14, 2004

**MASON COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
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**TO: KMAS, KRXV, SHELTON-MASON COUNTY JOURNAL, THE OLYMPIAN,
SHELTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, NORTH MASON CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE, CITY OF SHELTON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL,
THE SUN**

Re: Bats and Rabies

Bats are shy, nocturnal mammals. Bats are beneficial to our environment. They play a critical role in keeping down the population of night-flying insects. Bats have a very important place in nature. Bats are, however, the only rabies reservoir in Washington.

Problems occur when bats come inside our homes. They can squeeze through a space as small as one-quarter inch by 1½ inches in size. The health department has received several reports of bats in homes recently. You can find tips for batproofing buildings at healthlinks.washington.edu/nwcphp/rabies/. Tips include putting screens on windows and keeping doors shut or using a screen door.

Humans have been infected with bat rabies after minimal or no documented contact with bats. Washington State has reported two such deaths, one in 1995 and one in 1997. A rabies exposure must be considered when a bat is physically present and a possible bite cannot be excluded. If a bat is found in a bedroom where people were sleeping exposure may have occurred. If you find a bat in an area where people have been sleeping, capture the bat without touching it and call your local health department. Contact your doctor to determine the potential for rabies exposure, the need for treatment and to decide whether or not to test the animal for rabies.

Do not handle any wild animals, especially bats. Children should tell an adult if they find a bat (dead or alive) at home, at school or with a pet. Protect your pets by having them vaccinated for rabies.

For more information on bats and rabies, contact your veterinarian or the Mason County Department of Health Services at 360-427-9670 Ext. 358.

Ron Henrickson, Mason County Administrator