

transport, offer to transport, sale, barter, or exchange, offer to sell, barter, or exchange, distribution, offer to distribute, and release into the environment of prairie dogs and other specific animals, but allows parties to apply for exemptions in instances that would not pose a risk of establishing or spreading the monkeypox virus. Thus, importers of small mammals would have to find animals other than African rodents to satisfy market demands for unusual pets. Firms that supply prairie dogs and other listed animals as pets would be unable to do so and would have to switch to different animals. In addition, some animals may be destroyed if it is determined that such action is necessary to prevent the further spread of monkeypox in the United States. While we have not generated quantitative estimates of the magnitude of these effects, available evidence suggests that they are relatively small.

We invite comment on the economic analysis in support of this interim final rule.

C. Need for the Rule

A new infectious disease, if uncontrolled, can have large adverse economic effects. It does so because a single infection can lead to a few new cases, which in turn can lead to many others. Through this multiplier effect, a single uncontrolled case of a new disease may trigger an epidemic. For example, West Nile virus, a mosquito-borne zoonotic disease originally from Africa, sickened more than four thousand Americans and killed 284 in 2002 alone, although it was not recorded in the United States before 1999 (Ref. 24). West Nile virus has also affected populations of many indigenous species of birds and mammals. Existing economic incentives to control such risks are generally inadequate because the costs of such

risks to third parties are not borne by the owners of infected animals.

Notwithstanding the inadequacy of incentives to control risks associated with monkeypox virus, trade in some of the animal species affected by this rule fell before any announced government action. An on-line trading service, *exoticpets.com*, listed on June 13, 2003, all of the advertisements to sell prairie dogs that had been posted since May 15, 2003. These data, though they represent advertised prices and not the actual prices of completed transactions at a single website, suggest that the market responded very quickly to rumors linking prairie dogs to the monkeypox outbreak. Five announcements to sell or to buy prairie dogs as pets appeared in the 7 days beginning May 15, 2003. Three more advertisements appeared in the 7 days starting May 22, 2003, and ending May 28, 2003, with the very last announcement posted on May 27, 2003.

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