

# Controlling the Rat - A Community Effort

Rats like to live where people live. They quickly adjust to the neighborhood. Rats can thrive on just an ounce of food and water daily, so when they enter a neighborhood and gain access to meat, fish, vegetables and grains, they will stay. Rats prefer to feed in and around homes, restaurants and businesses. But they will settle for scraps from trash bags and cans, private yards and what they find at the community refuse disposal and transfer station. Rats get the shelter they need from tall weeds and grass, fences and walls, rubbish piles and abandoned appliances.

If rats are living in your neighborhood, there are steps you should take, even if they aren't in your home. Rats move freely in and out of buildings in the neighborhood, so any steps that your neighbors take to control rats will encourage them to move into a nearby building (maybe yours!). A community effort works best, where everyone in the neighborhood takes steps at the same time to prevent rats from entering the buildings and to remove their food and shelter.

## Checking for Rats

The sooner you know rats have entered your home, the easier it will be to get rid of them. Here's how to check.

- **Listen.**
  - After dark, turn on the lights in a dark room or basement and listen for any scurrying sounds.
  - Listen for gnawing sounds when it is quiet.
- **Look.**
  - Move stored materials and furniture to uncover any hiding places.
  - Look at packaged goods, doors, windows, baseboards, and electrical cords for chewed spots, tooth marks, woodchips or shavings.
  - Check for freshly dug earth near holes around foundations, walls, and embankments. Look under sidewalks, floors and platforms.

- Check for rub marks - dark smears along hallways, or near pipes, beams, edges of stairs or around gnawed holes.
- Check near walls, food supplies and pathways for droppings. Fresh droppings are dark and soft; old droppings are hard, or gray and brittle. Fresh droppings are a sure sign of a current infestation.
- **Watch.**
  - Dusty areas often show signs of pawprints or tailmarks. Sprinkle flour around the area and check for tracks for a few days.
  - Place a small quantity of food where rats can get at it, and check daily for signs of feeding.

## How Rats Get In

Once you know how rats come into a building, you can check your home for places they could use and take steps to prevent them from moving in. Rats (and mice) can enter buildings:

- through cracks or holes in walls or foundations, even holes as small as a dime;
- by digging under house foundations if they are shallow enough;
- through open windows, doors, sidewalk grates, or vents (check in the basement or walls for vent openings);
- by squeezing through openings in the foundation or wall for pipes or wires;
- through floor drains, quarter inch gaps under doors, letter drops and fan openings; and
- from inside large packages of food or merchandise.

## Keeping Rats Out

It is much easier to keep rats out than to get rid of them once they have moved in. But, taking these steps help control rats once they have come in. It's a three-step approach.

- Don't feed rats. Limit their food source by placing trash in covered metal or heavy duty plastic trash containers. The heavy duty plastic cans on wheels are resistant to rats' chewing, and so are metal cans. Fix plumbing leaks to cut off their water source. Keep the house and yard neat and clean. Remove uneaten pet foods. Don't fill up your bird feeder. Clean up food spills. Store food in rat-resistant containers. Avoid storing food in basements.

- Remove rats' shelter. Indoors, replace wooden basement floors with poured concrete. Place storage racks at a height of 18 inches above the floor. Move appliances, sinks and cabinets so they are flush against the wall or out far enough that you can clean behind them. Outdoors, restrict their shelter by rat-proofing all buildings in the area and removing outside shelters like appliances, junk piles, old fences and walls. Keep the property, including alleys and yards, clean and trash-free. Pile wood and other stored items at least 18 inches above the ground and away from the walls. Clean out the area behind wooden steps, especially those leading into the house.
- Keep them out. Put in self-closing doors that open outward, and use latches or spring locks to keep doors closed. Check to see that doors and windows close tightly, and use metal screens on all windows that are kept open. Protect basement windows with a 1/2 inch wire mesh (called hardware cloth). Cover the edges of doors, windows and screens, which can be gnawed, with sheet metal or hardware cloth. Make a collar around pipe and wire openings into the house with pieces of sheet metal or tin cans. Rats cannot easily gnaw through metal. Fasten floor drains tightly to keep sewer rats from coming in.

## Getting Rid of Rats

The two best ways to remove rats are traps or poison. The use of either requires caution!

**Traps.** Choose wooden base snap traps, and enlarge the traps by fastening a 2-inch square of cardboard to each trigger. Set out several traps at a time - at least 10 if you think there are many rats. Place the traps behind boxes and against walls, so that the rats must pass over the trigger. Be sure the traps are out of the reach of children and pets! Fasten food attractive to rats, such as peanut butter, raisin bread, bacon or gumdrops, tightly on the trigger of each trap. Don't let the trap run out of bait. An advantage to traps is that they are less of a hazard to children and pets than poison.

**Poison.** Warfarin, chlorophaconone and Pival are all rat poisons. They work by making the rats' blood unable to clot, so the rats die of internal bleeding. Rat poisons must be fed daily for six to 10 days. Read the poison label before you begin, and be careful to follow all steps. Watch out for children and pets! Make sure the baits are clearly marked, and put them in low traffic, secure areas that might attract rats, such as under or behind boards, boxes, pipes or cans, and out of the rain and snow. Remove the baits when all signs of rats are gone. Follow what the label says about how to dispose of the leftover poison. If, after a month or two, there are still

signs of rats, skip a month and start again. Stopping for a month and then starting helps keep the rats from building up resistance to the poison.

## **Keeping Rats Under Control**

If you do have rats, it's a community problem and the entire neighborhood should work together.

Once the rat infestation is under control, the goal is to prevent them from coming back. Help yourself and your neighbors by keeping trash picked up and placed in covered, rat-resistant containers. Promptly remove or repair any shelter areas, such as fences and old appliances. Periodically check for new entry holes into neighborhood buildings, and seal them up quickly.