

**RODENT CONTROL**



**RATS THRIVE ON DOG FOOD  
AND BIRD FOOD**

**SUFFOLK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES**

For additional information on Rodent Control contact:

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Cover photo: Courtesy of CDC

## **RODENTS ARE OF PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN**

Rodents are of public health concern because of the diseases that they may carry and transmit to humans. To catch a disease from these animals generally requires someone to be living in their close proximity for an extended period of time. Hanta viral disease has been the only human illness attributed to rodents in Suffolk County in recent years. Two cases in the early 1990's resulted in the patients' deaths.

Beyond their public health significance, the physical damage they can cause to a building or to personal goods can be expensive to repair or replace. Rodents gnawing on electric wire insulation can even short the wires out and start a fire.

## **WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?**

The question most often asked by the public is "**Where do they come from?**" Chances are very good that they came from a house with a yard similar to yours that has a **food supply**, harborage and occupants who were not aware of the signs of an infestation. The rodents have dispersed through the neighborhood finding their way to you because the **food source** they depended on has either, been removed, depleted or otherwise made unavailable and inadequate rodent control practices were employed to eliminate them first.

## WHY ARE THEY HERE?

If you have an infestation the correct question is “**Why are they here?**” They are at your house because there is a **food source** near by that is large enough and persistent enough to sustain them. Most often the **food** is found within 100’ of the burrows in which they generally live.

Vacant lots, sumps and vacant houses are frequently believed to be the source of the rats. However, unless a satisfactory **food source** is present on the property, rodents will not be able to survive there. When infestations are found on these types of properties, it is because neighbors have provided the necessary **food source**.

Often we are told that “I’ve been feeding the birds or had the dog or an apple tree for years and never had a problem before. Why now?” This shows the extent of the rodent population in Suffolk County. They are here, but we are not overrun by them. They are usually easily eliminated and with awareness and little effort, they can be prevented from returning.

## ***PREVENTION***

**It is better to prevent having a rodent infestation than try to eliminating one after they have moved in. The key to controlling rodent populations is to deny them access to a food source. If there is no food, they cannot survive and they will not stay.**

Do not feed domestic or wild animals outside.

Store garbage in tightly covered rodent and insect proof containers.

Store grass seed, dog food and other **food sources** in metal, glass or heavy plastic containers.

Remove fallen fruit, nuts and vegetables from the ground. These are **food sources**.

Remove dog and other animal manures on a daily basis; dog manure can contain up to 70% protein and could be a **food source** for rodents.

## RODENT CONTROL PROGRAM

We ask you to use the following procedures to eliminate the colony and to prevent their return or spread through the neighborhood.

An active infestation should be eliminated through an integrated rodent control program. The elements of a successful program must include:

- a - environmental sanitation to eliminate **food sources** and harborage
- b - effective rodent proofing of buildings and
- c - an efficient extermination program.

When an infestation exists, these control measures must be implemented in concert and on a **continuous** basis until the infestation is eliminated. Failure to do all of the above steps can result in the infestation recurring or making the rodents disperse to adjacent properties in search of **food**.

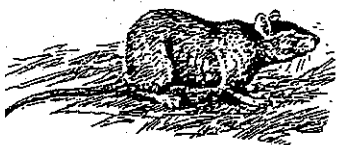
### LOOK FOR THESE RODENT SIGNS

- Droppings - on food, food storage shelving and floors, especially in corners and along baseboards.
- Gnawings\* - on **food** packaging, on door and wall moldings, on exterior window frames and door sills, inside and outside of rubber garage door gasket, holes that allow pipes to pass through a wall or floor
- Rub marks - oily smear on baseboards or walls from rodent fur.
- Runways - worn patch of soil indicating travel path from the burrow to the **food source**
- Burrows - holes in the ground adjacent to building walls, or under things on or close to the ground, such as woodpiles, lumber, decks, sheds. Low lying bushes and ground covers should be checked. These holes are the size of a tennis ball (3") for rats or a marble (1/2") for mice.
- Exterior - rats may gain entrance through an opening as small as the size openings of a quarter (1"), mice need only openings as small as 1/4".
- Footprints - in **food** spillage, dust, and dirt.

\*Rodents have to gnaw to keep their teeth worn down. Their incisors are always growing; if they didn't gnaw, the teeth would eventually block the use of their mouth. Thus, they can and will gnaw easily through wood and composite materials. Even holes in cement can be widened to permit entry.

**PROPER IDENTIFICATION IS IMPORTANT**

**NORWAY RAT**



15"

8"

7"

Heavy set

Brown/gray white belly

Small, close set

100'-150'

Burrows in ground



Blunt (3/4")

**BODY LENGTH**

**TORSO**

**TAIL LENGTH**

**BODY**

**COLOR**

**EARS**

**TERRITORY**

**HARBORAGE**

**DROPPINGS**

**HOUSE MOUSE**



7"

3"

4"

Small, slender

Gray

Large, prominent

10'-30'

Convenient spaces



Pointed (1/4")



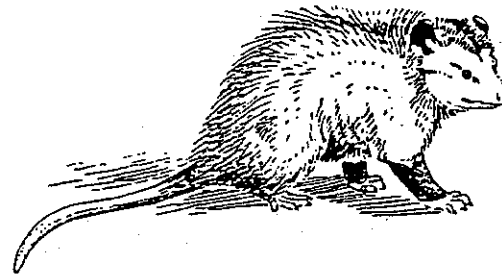
COMMON RODENT LIKE ANIMALS



Muskrat  
16'-24"  
Dark glossy brown  
Hairless tail, dark  
Aquatic



Chipmunk  
4"-5"  
Chestnut, black stripe  
Bushy Tail  
Varied habitats



Opossum  
25"-40"  
Gray, white face  
Hairless tail appears pink  
Common in suburbia

## **RODENT PROOFING AND HARBORAGE**

All openings into the dwelling and out buildings should be sealed. Holes in foundations should be sealed with an appropriate material such as cement, hardware cloth or metal flashing. Basement windows should be in good repair, garage doors that do not properly seal to the garage floor should be repaired and have a heavy rubber seal installed along the bottom edge.

Elevate all materials (firewood, scrap wood, etc.) that are stored on the ground to a height of at least 8" from the ground.

Areas under low lying decks and the interior and exterior of outside storage sheds should be checked for rodent activity on a regular basis.

## **RODENTICIDES**

The most effective method for exterminating rats on the exterior of the property is by the use of rodenticides, more commonly called poison. Poisons may be purchased at your local home center or hardware store. Rat poison comes in block form or in boxes and bags. Most poison that is available to the public for rodent control is an anti-coagulant type, which will cause the rat to die from internal bleeding. The older types of poison must be consumed over a period of several days. Some newer formulations can act within one day. Always follow label directions when using any rodenticide.

Whichever poisoning regimen is used, every effort must be taken to keep the material away from children and non-target animals. Poisoning is not a recommended technique for infestations in an occupied dwelling unless performed by a professional exterminator.

**NEVER LEAVE POISON IN THE OPEN OR WHERE IT IS NOT PROTECTED FROM TAMPERING.**

### **PROFESSIONAL EXTERMINATORS**

The Suffolk County Department of Health Services recommends that homeowners use a professional exterminator to apply poison to eliminate a rodent infestation. It is suggested that the consumer verify that the exterminator is certified by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. In commercial or multiple residence circumstances a Certified Pesticide Applicator must be used to control the problem.

**Poison control telephone number: 800-222-1222**

(If your pet ingests the poison call your vet or an emergency veterinary service in your area)

## **CLEAN-UP IN RODENT CONTAMINATED AREAS**

1. While working in areas contaminated by rodents, it is recommended that rubber gloves and at least a particle size face mask be worn.
2. Any food products or food containers chewed into by rodents should be disposed of immediately. The food is considered contaminated and represents a danger to health if consumed.
3. Any areas contaminated by rodent droppings should first be disinfected by spraying with a 5% bleach\water solution until the droppings and associated materials are damp enough to prevent dust from being aerosolized during removal. The area should then be left for one-half hour to allow the bleach odor to air out. The rodent droppings may then be mopped up or scraped into a dust pan and disposed of.

## **DO NOT VACUUM RODENT DROPPINGS**

4. Spraying the areas with a commercial insecticide is recommended for areas infested by rodents or in areas where dead rat carcasses have been removed. Fleas and ticks found on rodents have been implicated in human illness.

## SELF INSPECTION CHECK LIST

<u>FOOD SOURCES</u>	YES/NO
1. FEEDING DOG OUTDOORS	-----
2. FEEDING WILD BIRDS* OR OTHER ANIMALS OUTDOORS	-----
3. IMPROPERLY CONTAINED GARBAGE ON PROPERTY	-----
4. GARBAGE CANS UNCOVERED AND/OR WITH HOLES.	-----
5. FRUITS AND NUTS FROM TREES ON THE GROUND.	-----
6. VEGETABLES IN THE GARDEN ON THE GROUND.	-----
7. GRASS SEED OR ANIMAL FEED STORED IN NON-RODENT PROOF CONTAINERS	-----
8. DAILY CLEANUP AND PROPER DISPOSAL OF ANIMAL MANURES	-----
9. BAR-B-QUE GRILL THAT PERMITS RODENT ENTRY TO MEAT DRIPPINGS	-----

\*If you wish to feed wild birds be aware that any bird feeder that results in the deposit of seed onto the ground represents a potential dining invitation for rats.

**SELF INSPECTION CHECK LIST**

**BUILDING ACCESS**

YES/NO

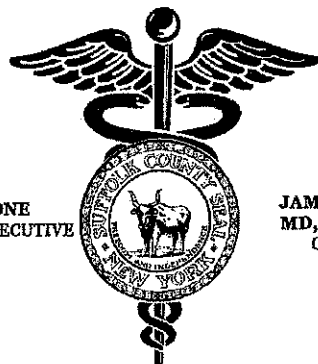
- 1. FOUNDATIONS, DOORS AND BASEMENT WINDOWS NOT IN GOOD REPAIR. -----
- 2. FOUNDATION UTILITY PIPE AND WIRE HOLES INADEQUATELY SEALED. -----
- 3. GARAGES OR OUTBUILDINGS INADEQUATELY RODENT PROOF. -----

**EXTERIOR**

- 1. LITTER AND/OR DEBRIS ON GROUND -----
- 2. LUMBER, FIREWOOD & OTHER MATERIALS STORED ON THE GROUND. -----
- 3. DECKING INSTALLED THAT PERMITS GOOD RODENT HARBORAGE. -----

**IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE, YOU MAY BE INCREASING YOUR CHANCES OF HAVING RATS ON YOUR PROPERTY.**

**STEVEN BELLONE**  
SUFFOLK COUNTY EXECUTIVE



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MD, MPH, MBA, MSW  
COMMISSIONER

**SUFFOLK COUNTY**  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES