

Pest Control Information - Rats

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Introduction

The Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 places a duty on owners and occupiers of property to keep their land free from rodents and a duty on the Council to ensure that owners and occupiers fulfil their duty.

If owners and occupiers fail in their obligations under the Act, formal action may be taken against them by the Council and/or they may be required to engage a private contractor.

About rats

The most frequent type of rat is the common rat and this is mainly active at night. Rats are a major hazard to health as they can spread diseases such as Weils Disease and can cause contamination of foodstuffs. They can also cause considerable damage to foodstuffs. Rats can cause structural damage and can breed at an alarming rate particularly in the spring and autumn. Rats require a nearby water source and are often found in and near sewers or drains.

Description

The adult common rat may weight from 10oz (300gm) and has brown fur on its back and grey underneath; its tail is shorter than its head and body.

Distribution

The common rat is the most abundant and widespread species and can be found anywhere that offers shelter and food - including sewers. They are efficient burrowers and favour compost heaps and the ground underneath hedges and sheds where they will dig shallow burrows and form nests with dry grass and leaves. In houses they will nest in wall cavities and beneath floorboards.

Rats are active mainly at night but may be seen in search of food and water during the day.

Significance

Rats are a major hazard to health. They spread many forms of disease, some of which can be fatal to man such as Weils' Disease. They may eat food which is intended for human consumption and they often damage much more which has to be discarded. Through their gnawing habit they also cause considerable structural damage to woodwork, water pipes, electric cables and so on.

Life Cycle

The life expectancy of rats is around 18 months, during which time a female will typically breed five times. The average size of a litter is between seven and eight. Breeding occurs throughout the year but especially in Spring and Autumn.

What to look out for

There are some simple tell-tale signs to look out for that will reveal whether you have rats in your home:

- damage from gnawing and feeding such as tooth marks on packaging and wires;
- holes - rat holes about 80mm in diameter;
- greasy smears along walls, skirting boards and pipes from rodent fur;
- droppings - rat droppings are 15mm to 20mm long, and are usually grey or black in colour with a pointed end;
- flattened grass, plants and other vegetation where rats have created their own pathway;
- nests (sometimes found indoors, in lofts or under floorboards); and
- scratching and gnawing sounds from the loft, under the floorboards and in wall cavities.

Control

You will need professional help in controlling colonies of rats. Their ability to burrow, climb and jump, and the speed with which they breed and form new colonies, make rats difficult to control.

- The following points may help to prevent an infestation:
- make sure drainpipes are not broken, and drain inspection covers are in good

- condition;
- if you feed birds, use a bird table or a hanging net, and ensure any food that falls to the ground is cleared away;
- don't leave food for other wildlife on the ground and clean up after rabbits, guinea pigs and other pets, making sure their cages are raised off the ground;
- don't put meat into compost heaps or compost bins or other non-fruit or vegetable waste onto open compost heaps - use a properly designed compost unit;
- when building a compost heap or siting a compost bin, use strong small gauge wire mesh on the base or site them on a concrete base to stop rats digging underneath;
- secure outbuildings and sheds so that rats and mice cannot get inside; and
- make sure gardens don't become overgrown, and do not let rubbish build up outside (such as old carpets, timber, etc) as this will provide protection for rats

In the event of infestation our Pest Control Officers will visit and survey the area to

determine the most appropriate control measures, which may include the laying of poison baits along rat runs and in the drainage system.

The baits must be left undisturbed and will be examined by our officers when a revisit is made.

Safety

All pesticides are applied by our qualified and experienced staff to ensure the safety of the public and to minimise damage to the environment.