

RATS

Rats pose a major health risk to the community. They carry and transmit many diseases found in Australia including Murine typhus fever, Rat-bite fever, Weil's disease and Lymphocytic choriomeningitis. They contaminate food and food preparation areas with their fur, droppings and urine causing *Salmonella* food poisoning and economic loss. They are considered a nuisance because of the damage they make to buildings as well as the foul odours they create with their colonies. Their continual gnawing through pipes, conduits and electrical wiring has been the cause of electrical fires.

Owners and occupiers of premises are required by law to prevent harbourage of rats and ensure their destruction.

Signs of Rats

Droppings, oblong, 12-20mm long in cupboards and sheds are usually the first sign of a rat infestation. Shiny, dark, pliable droppings are an indication of recent rodent activity.

- Remains of snail shells with the sides eaten out, nutshells, bones, seeds and other debris in the corner of sheds and other private spots.
- Greasy rub marks on vertical surfaces from continual contact with dirty, greasy rodent fur.
- Signs of fruit and vegetables from gardens having been eaten.
- Burrow holes around buildings.
- Gnawing damage in a wide range of materials including wood, soft metals, soap, food containers, conduit and cables.
- Squeaking, gnawing or movement sounds in walls, cupboards, ceilings and under floorboards.
- Pets more excitable than usual.
- Footprints and tail marks on the ground or along dusty surfaces.
- Nests hidden in buildings made from rags, paper, cardboard, straw and other materials.

Preventing Rat Problems

The presence and number of rats is determined by the availability of food and shelter. By denying rodents these you can effectively control rat populations. You can do this by:

- Stacking wood off the ground (about 40cm) and away from sides of sheds
- and fences.
- Removing fruit and nuts from vines and trees at the end of the season and picking rotten fruit off the ground. Removing fruit from palm trees when in bloom.
- Keeping the backyard as clean as possible and free of debris.
- Maintaining rubbish and compost bins in good repair with secure lids and free from holes.
- Keeping pet dishes clean and storing bulk pet food in closed containers.
- Regularly removing garden waste from sheds and around the yard.

Rodent Control Methods

Baiting and trapping are the two most common ways of controlling a rat problem.

Baiting involves laying poison baits along rodent paths, and in roof and wall cavities that are easily accessible. Many brands are available at supermarkets and hardware stores. You must read the packet instructions and check baits regularly to see if rats have been eating them. It is very important not to place baits where small children or pets have access to them. Look for rat bait with Bromodiolone or Brodifacoum as the active ingredient. When placing the rat bait in the roof cavity, place the bait within reach of the access hole so the baits can be easily checked.

If an alternative to poison baits is sought, trapping is the next most common way of ridding a premise of rats. There are two different types of traps – the old-fashioned snap back trap and a plastic capture box is now available as well. Different types of bait can be used including bacon, chocolate, fish, nuts, prunes, apples or peanut butter. Rats are sometimes afraid of new objects or surroundings so they may stay clear of the trap until it becomes familiar. Placing the trap in the path of a rat and hiding the trigger under straw or cardboard is one way to get around this trap

shyness. Traps should never be set above food or food preparation surfaces to avoid contamination by urine, droppings or blood.

Should you need any further advice on rats, please contact one of the City's Environmental Health Officers on 9841 9333.