Preventing Rats on Your Property

A Guide for Property Owners and Tenants

A Healthy Homes Guide

NYC Health

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How to Use This Guide

Too many New Yorkers live in communities with rats. If you have rats, or received a notice from the City of New York that rats were found on your property, this guide is for you.

To use this guide:

1. Follow the steps to find and control rats – or hire a good pest control company to do it.
2. When you hire a pest control company, show them this guide and ask them to use it.
3. Rats are a community problem. Show this guide to your neighbors, tenants or landlord. Call 311 for more copies.

How the Health Department Inspects for Rats

The Health Department inspects private and public properties for rats. The property will fail an inspection if any of the following signs are found:

- Live rats
- Rat droppings
- Burrows (places where rats live)
- Gnaw marks from rats' teeth
- Tracks or runways, such as rub marks or flattened paths outside burrows
- Excessive garbage or clutter that give rats a place to hide

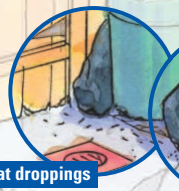
Property owners who fail an inspection will receive a Commissioner's Order and a copy of the inspection report in the mail. Owners will have five days to correct the problem. If the property fails a second inspection, the owner may receive a Notice of Violation, which could result in fines. Depending on the severity of the problem, the Health Department may exterminate or clean up the property, and bill the owner.

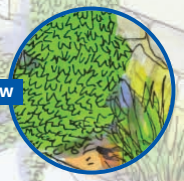
How to Control Rats

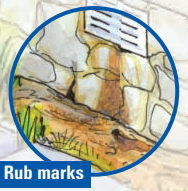
To control rats, you have to remove everything they need to survive: food, water, shelter and ways to get around.

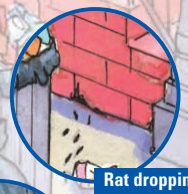
- Rats come out at night, so walk around outside with a flashlight after dark. This will help you see where rats are going, so you can check for burrows when it gets light.

Step One: Look for Evidence

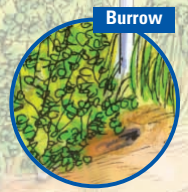








- Look for places where rats live. Most rats live in nests or burrows. Burrows are holes in dirt or concrete from one to four inches wide, with smooth edges. Burrows can be found under bushes and plants. They will often have an entrance and exit hole.
- Look for droppings. Droppings are often found close to garbage. If they're moist and dark, it's a sign that rats are in the area.
- Look for holes and gnaw marks on wood and plastic garbage cans.
- Check walls and grass for signs of runways. Rats run along the same path many times a day, leaving dark greasy track marks along walls and worn down paths in grass.



Step Two: Clean Up

Wash Away Droppings and Track Marks

Rats communicate and attract each other through their urine and droppings.

- Sweep up droppings, and clean up dark greasy track marks. Wash down the area with water and a mild bleach solution (one part bleach, 10 parts water).
- Talk to your neighbors and work together to clean up, so rats don't move from one place to another.

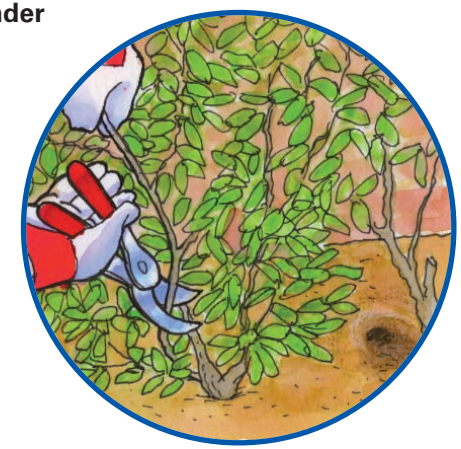
Get Rid of Clutter

Clutter gives rats lots of places to hide, sleep, nest and reproduce.

- Remove (and recycle) piles of newspapers, paper bags, cardboard and bottles.
- Clear out your basement and yard.
- Store items away from walls and off the ground.

Control Weeds, Shrubs and Bushes

Rats are often found in burrows under bushes and plants.



- Keep tall grass, bushes, shrubs and mulch away from building foundations. Pull out ivy around burrows.
- Keep ground bare six inches from buildings, and trim under shrubs.
- Make space between plants, and avoid dense planting.
- Keep gardens free of weeds and trash.

Step Three: Starve Them

Rats only need one ounce of food each day. Don't make your garbage their food.

Manage Your Garbage

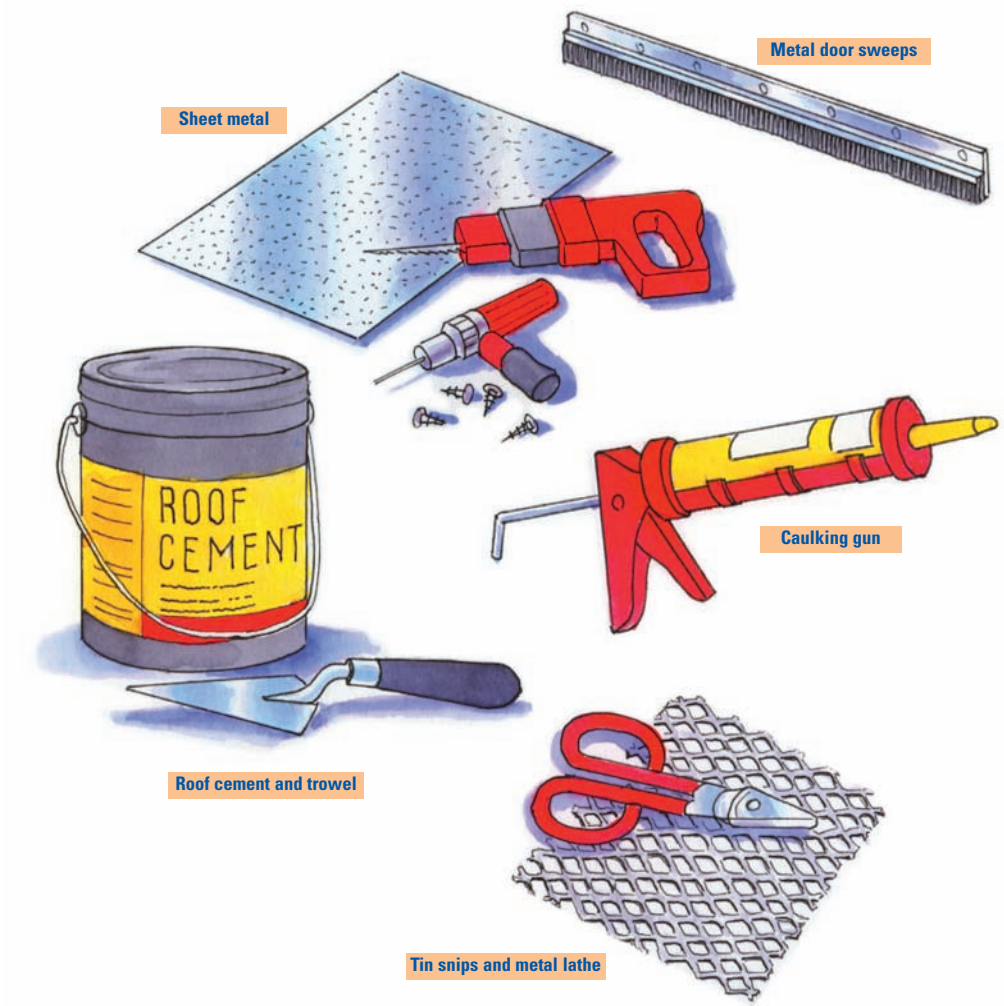
- Bring garbage cans and bags to the curb as close to pick-up time as possible. Leaving them out overnight invites rats.
- Make sure you have enough garbage cans to hold trash between pickups.
- Use hard plastic or metal cans with tight fitting lids.
- Insist that tenants put garbage *inside* cans.

Keep Food Away

- Keep all food in tightly sealed containers.
- Don't put food out for stray cats, pigeons or squirrels.

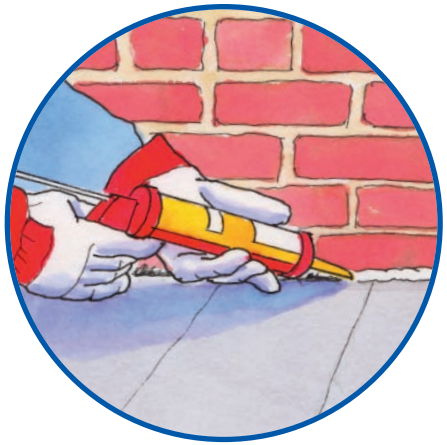
Step Four: Shut Them Out

Rats chew holes into buildings, and can squeeze through cracks and holes as small as a half inch. To keep rats out for good, seal all holes and cracks in foundations, walls, floors, underneath doors and around windows. Most repairs can be done by maintenance staff, superintendents, handy men or pest control professionals. Materials are inexpensive and available at most hardware stores.



Seal Cracks and Small Holes

- Seal cracks and small holes with caulk. Or use roofing cement – it's durable and easily applied with a caulking gun.
- Close gaps under doors with rodent-resistant metal door sweeps.
- Close window gaps with metal flashing.
- Put screens on vents, especially on lower floors.

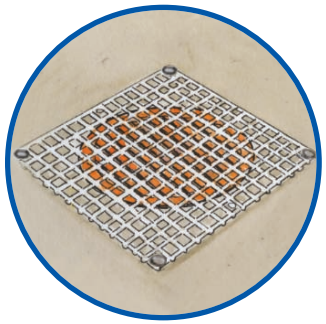


Fill Large Gaps and Holes

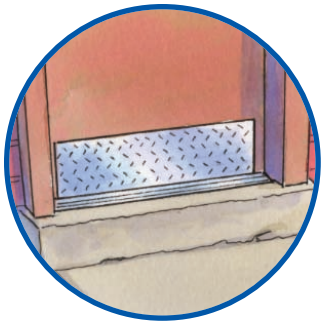
The way to close large gaps and holes depends on the building material and amount of space behind the hole.

- Use mortar or ready-mix cement to fill gaps and holes in cement and stone foundations. Cover large holes with metal lathe or screening, then seal with mortar or cement.

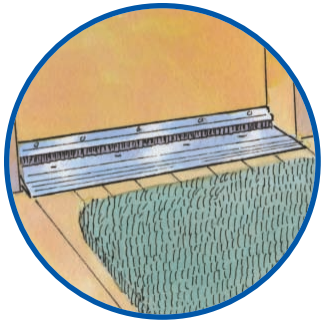
- Cover floor drains and vents with heavy-duty metal screening, secured with masonry nails or cement.



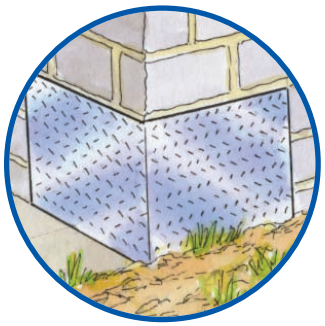
- Install sheet metal kick plates on the lower exterior of doors where rats have been gnawing or entering the building. Install metal thresholds underneath.



- Use door sweeps to keep gaps under doors smaller than a quarter inch.



- Consider installing heavy gauge sheet metal between foundations and the ground.



- Seal pipes leading into walls with escutcheon plates ("pipe collars"). Check pipes regularly for leaks.

Close Inactive Burrows

An inactive burrow will often have leaves, cobwebs or other debris around the entrance. These burrows should be closed so rats can't get back in.

- Close burrows in soil by filling with soil and tamping down with a shovel, or by stepping on them.

- Close burrows in cracked or broken sidewalks with metal filler and cement.

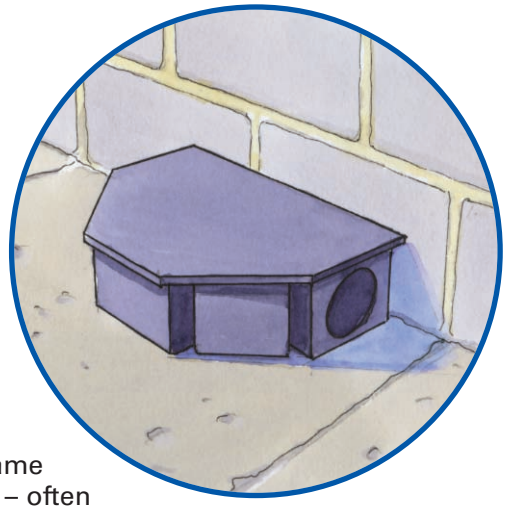
Step Five: Wipe Them Out

Rodent Baiting

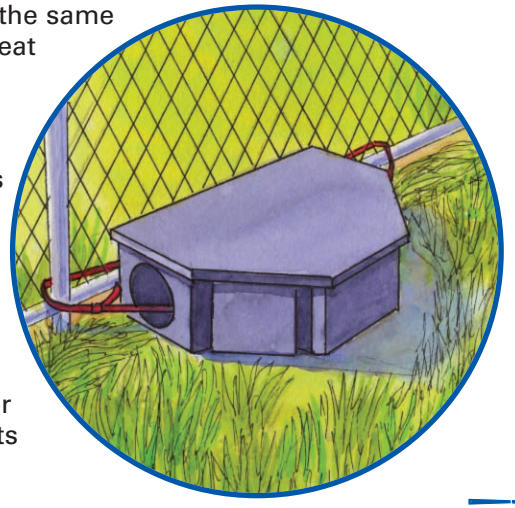
Rodent bait is an effective way to wipe out rats. But applying these poisons is a job for professionals. If you live in your own home without tenants, the law allows you to place rodent bait yourself. *But commercial and multi-unit property owners must hire a pest control company – it is against the law for them to place their own bait.*

Make sure your pest control company follows these guidelines:

- Always read and follow the manufacturer's label, and use the smallest effective amount of bait.
- Use disposable gloves when handling bait, and wash your hands afterwards.
- Use secured bait chunks (called bait "blocks") inside tamper-resistant bait stations. Secure or anchor bait stations to the ground or fence with cement, caulk or wire.



- Place bait stations on the same path as rats normally travel – often along building walls and fence lines. Since rats always travel on the same path, they're more likely to eat from stations along it.
- Use a funnel to place loose pellet bait into burrows. This will help ensure pellets are placed deep into the burrow, so rats can't push them out.
- Bagged bait should not be used in burrows or bait stations. Rats can push or carry them out of burrows or stations, where children, pets or wildlife can get to them.



- Store and place bait stations where children and pets can't get to them.
- Never use a product that doesn't have a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Registration Number.
- Replace bait after it's been eaten. Leave bait stations and bait in place for at least two weeks after all rat activity has stopped. Monitor on a monthly basis.
- Never use Tres Pasitos or other illegal bait products.

For more information about pesticides, call the National Pesticide Information Center at (800) 858-7378.

Choosing and Working With a Pest Control Company

There are more than 1,000 pest control companies and 3,500 licensed pest professionals in the New York City area. Not all are well trained in managing rats. To get rid of rats, you must choose the right company, be clear about what you want done and monitor performance.

How to Find the Right Company

Ask Around and Interview Companies

- Ask your neighbors and friends for referrals.
- Look in the phone book and online for "integrated pest management" services. These companies are more likely to inspect, monitor and make recommendations and repairs.
- Interview companies. Ask for references, including previous customers.
- Make sure the company is licensed with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. To check, call (718) 482-4994, or visit http://www.dec.ny.gov.

A good company will…

- Inspect your property before giving you a price quote.
- Give you a written inspection report, and an action plan.
- Base quotes on inspection findings, not flat fees. The cheapest services are rarely the best.
- Make referrals for structural repair, if required.
- Visit often until the job is done.
- Put bait in tamper-resistant containers.
- Employ qualified, well-trained exterminators.
- Educate you on how to prevent rats.
- Work with you until rats are gone.

Work Together

- Walk around with the pest control professional during each visit, and keep track of work.
- Agree on a service plan and cost.
- Follow-up on referrals and recommendations.

Myths and Facts About Rats

1. **Myth:** Rats the size of cats live in NYC.
   Fact: Most rats in our area weigh no more than one pound. When a rat is scared, it will fluff up its fur and look bigger, to scare away its enemies.

2. **Myth:** "Rat cities" are in our sewers and subway system.
   Fact: Only small pockets live in NYC sewers and subways. Most rats live in burrows at ground or basement level.

3. **Myth:** City rats are "immune" to poison.
   Fact: Today's poisons work fine – but only if rats eat them. When garbage is easily accessible, rats don't take the bait.

4. **Myth:** More than one kind of rat lives in NYC.
   Fact: Only the Norway rat lives here. It varies in color and size, depending on how old it is and where it lives. As a result, people call it different names (city rat, brown rat, sewer rat, wharf rat, river rat, alley rat, house rat). It's all one species.

5. **Myth:** Cats, dogs, hawks and other animals help control city rats.
   Fact: They may kill an occasional rat, but they can't keep up with rats' rapid breeding rates. **Only people can make a difference!**

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NYC Department of Housing Preservation & Development
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