

Town of Stoughton

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Board of Health

Rodent Informational Guide

History

Rats are and have been a part of the Massachusetts ecosystem since the area was originally settled in the early 17th century. They are a “cosmopolitan” species and are commonly found in most urban areas, including Stoughton and neighboring communities.

Current rat population in Stoughton:

Over the past several years the Stoughton Board of Health and Animal Control have received an increased number of reports for outdoor rat activity. Most live in the ground near food sources. Female rodents can have an average litter 8 pups monthly, as the gestation period is only 3 weeks. Experts claim that several factors may be contributing to the uptick in the population. One investigation reports that the population has increased due to climate change with warmer & shorter winter months. Rats are typically less active during the colder parts of the year and are less likely to breed. With a warmer winter, they can breed more and have more offspring that will eventually increase the size of the population we see during the summer and fall although the average lifespan of a wild rat is typically one year. Additional reasons for increased in rat sightings may include:

- Construction- vibrations disrupting their below ground habitat
- Lack of natural predators such as coyotes, foxes, and birds of prey, due to ever expanding development and decreasing green spaces.

Additional reports believe the COVID-19 pandemic also played a factor into the increasing rat population in residential areas due to more people remaining home & generating more household trash. Rats are a natural part of the urban and rural environments in Stoughton and the surrounding greater Boston area.

Rats have been with us for a very long time and will thrive in places where they can find food, water, and shelter. In general, where there are people, rats will often follow. We have heard from colleagues in many neighboring communities that they are experiencing a similar uptick in rat sightings/reports. Stoughton is not unique in this trend.

FAQ's

What is Stoughton doing?

The Stoughton Board of Health, Animal Control & the Environmental Affairs Officer work with other Stoughton departments, residents & business owners to promote better understandings of rat behavior & how to minimize their presence & impact on the community. With the increased rat activity in town, these departments have been educating the public, businesses & construction project managers with information to promote & ensure best practices in the area of pest management & control. The Facilities Department pretreats for rodents on town projects & monitors for rodent presence throughout projects, taking appropriate pest control steps as needed. Also many Town buildings including the schools receive routine pest control service. The Stoughton BOH has enforcement authority for “interior” building infestations. The Town can also send violation notices to residents who do not store their outside putrescible trash properly, which is required to be stored in dumpsters or cans with tight fitting animal proof covers. The BOH has permitting & enforcement authority for garbage dumpsters as well.

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I have seen rats in my home or yard. Who should I call?

If you notice any evidence of rodent activity on your property, make sure you are not providing any food source by using rodent proof cans with tight fitting covers for all garbage stored outside. Do not leave any pet food outside. Do not feed the wildlife (no bird or squirrel feeders that become rat feeders at night). If the problem persists you may need to contact a licensed pest control company to assist you to properly address the issue. Pest control companies can be found in the local phone book or online.

Will the construction I see in my neighborhood increase rodent activity?

Construction doesn't lead to an increase in rats, but it can lead to a displacement with major land clearing projects or during demolition of existing buildings. Demolition permits are issued from the Stoughton Building Department but only after documentation that pest control companies have been hired to place bait stations onsite to decrease the onsite population prior to the actual demolition, to mitigate potential displacement of rodents. Increasing prevention strategies by owners & abutters working together with pest control companies ongoing throughout the projects, will help remediate rodent activity during extensive demolition or excavation projects.

Why do rats have such a bad reputation?

Rats are actually quite intelligent and interesting creatures. However, they have been given a bad reputation throughout history for their spread of disease. Luckily, the odds of a human contracting a disease from a rat is very low, as humans do not have repeated, direct contact with rodents. The risk for disease from rats becomes even smaller if people take proper precautions to keep their properties rodent/harborage free. As always, people should use gloves when handling any material a rodent may have come in contact with, & should wash their hands promptly after any contact or cleanup project.

How to Help Prevent a Rodent Infestation

1. Maintain your property in a sanitary manner.

- Keep grills clean
- Store woodpiles neatly with a 12-inch ground clearance
- Remove dog and cat feces promptly

2. Rodent proof all foundations, building structures (ex. sheds) and garages using durable materials such as ¼ inch mesh, metal hardware, or sheet metal. Eliminate &/or seal all gaps greater than ¼ inch.

3. Reduce or eliminate rodent accessible food, water, and harborage (potential shelter).

- Do not leave pet food out at night or any other food debris out for local wildlife
- Remove birdfeeders that rodents can access.
- All garbage should be stored with watertight receptacles made of metal or other durable, rodent proof material.
- Remove water sources, this also helps eliminate mosquito breeding habitats
- Keep compost securely covered

4. Thin vegetation and keep up with grass and shrubbery trimming.

5. Routinely inspect your property for evidence of rodents, including burrows, tracks, droppings, & chew marks.

6. If you live in rental housing & you see signs of rodents, tell your landlord. If your building has a dumpster, make sure to close all dumpster doors after depositing your garbage within which. Do not leave garbage outside of a dumpster.

7. Uncovered barrels or bags may be put out on the morning of your scheduled municipal garbage pickup day, but anything put out the night before must be stored in covered pest resistant receptacles.

8. Share this information with your neighbors. Rodent problems are a community issue. Working together will help eliminate this problem.

If you discover rodent infestation on your property, contact a licensed pest control company for assistance.