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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 cause to buildings as well as the foul odours they create with their colonies. Their continual gnawing through pipes, conduits and electrical wiring has also been the cause of electrical fires.

Owners and occupiers of premises are required by law to prevent rodents from living and breeding on their property.

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 such as garden waste and disused materials.
- Maintaining rubbish and compost bins in good repair with secure lids and free from holes or damage.
- Keeping pet dishes clean and storing bulk pet food in sealed containers.
- Block access holes and eaves with chicken wire so not to block ventilation.
- Keep chicken pens and aviaries clean.

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. 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. Many brands are available at supermarkets and hardware stores. You must follow the manufacturer's instructions and check baits regularly to see if rats have been eating them. It is very important not to place baits where small children, pets or wildlife can reach them. If possible, securing the bait in a safe spot with a nail or cable tie will avoid it being moved into an area where it can be accessed by others.

Many rodent baits can cause secondary poisoning of native animals, birds and pets.

It is strongly recommended to use First Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (FGARs) bait with coumatetralyl or warfarin as the active ingredient.

If an alternative to poison baits is sought, trapping is the next most common way of ridding a premises of rats. There are two different types of traps – the old-fashioned snap back trap and a live trap which allows the release of any unintended wildlife captures.

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 6820 3000.

**** DISCLAIMER ****

This information sheet is a guide only. Verification with original Local Laws, Acts, Planning Schemes, and other relevant documents is recommended for detailed references. The City of Albany accepts no responsibility for errors or omissions.

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