



RODENTS IN RETAIL SETTINGS



Retail environments face unique challenges when it comes to rodent control. Constant foot traffic means open doors that provide easy entry, and a variety of materials for food and harborage, including packaging and edible products, create a perfect environment for mice and rats. Additionally, rodents that choose to stick around could be carrying harmful diseases, such as Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome, Leptospirosis, Rat Bite Fever and Salmonella, all of which can ultimately transmit to customers, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Having a pack of rodents move into your store can garner bad publicity, leading to profit losses, decreased employee morale and a ruined reputation.

Evidence of infestation

The first sign of rodents in a retail space usually involves seeing one scurry across the floor. Other signs to look for are droppings, urine odors and gnaw marks on wood or baseboards. If any of these signs are present, do not assume it's a one-off situation. In a single year, a pair of rats can breed 2,000 babies if left unperturbed, according to Discover. Rodents build nests in walls, attics and drop-ceilings, so most people will not be able to estimate the true severity of the situation without professional help.

Prevent entry

The best way to prevent rodents from entering your retail space is to block entry in the first place. This is easier said than done, as mice have been known to squeeze through a hole the size of a dime.

Look for holes and entry points around the property. Especially during cold weather, rodents will seek out a warm shelter that can provide the resources they need to survive. Rodents can enter through a hole in a window, a gap under a door, the edge of a garage door, or foundation and attic vents. All vents on a building should be fitted with heavy mesh, and all crawl spaces should have a screen. Drains that exit a building should be covered with some sort of screen.

Especially in areas with heavy foot traffic, it's important to remember that rodents can enter the same way humans can; through the front door. All doors should fit snugly in their frames and close immediately after being released.

Remove resources

What draws rodents to retailers in the first place? Rodents are attracted to areas for three main reasons: harborage, food and water.

"[Unlike rats,] mice do not require an external water source as they can metabolize moisture very well from their food source," said Sandra Bishop, Branch Manager at Abell Pest Control.

Harborage, food and occasional water will be enough to establish a colony, which is why removing these resources is vital.

To reduce access to water, it's important to remove any standing water. Repair roof and plumbing leaks immediately to keep all areas

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as dry as possible. Prevent standing water in sinks, and enact a policy in which no open beverage containers are left unattended. Remember, even if customers cannot see a leak or puddle, rodents will still be able to find it since they are small enough to fit into areas where humans cannot.

Retail spaces that sell food products are particularly appealing because of the sustenance available. With access to food, rodents actually reproduce faster, explained Derek Cowan, Branch Manager at Abell Pest Control. Variety stores should ensure that all products are properly sealed on shelves, and immediately dispose of any products with damaged packaging. Store edible items a minimum of six inches off the floor by placing pallets on blocks or racks, and maintaining a two-foot distance between the ceiling and any food storage shelves.

By creating storage islands for food products, retailers are able to put distance between the walls, floors and ceilings that rodents commonly travel through, according to Food Safety Magazine. Any food items stored in break rooms or cafeterias should be kept in airtight containers when not being used.

After removing water and food sources, reduce harborage. Immediately after a shipment, all packaging materials should be disposed of in a tightly sealed receptacle or outdoor trash bin. Crumbling bricks, wood from pallets and plants are primary building blocks for rodent nests.

Multi-store retail issues

The majority of retail stores are in multi-unit buildings. Malls, shopping centers and large commercial spaces can have dozens of tenants sharing walls at any given time. This particular situation makes rodent prevention particularly nuanced. Although you may have removed food, water and harborage from your location, rodents may still get the resources they need from surrounding stores.

"[Rodents] could be harboring in one and feeding in another one. We find they'll run through drop ceilings, along wiring or through holes. They could be feeding in your local variety store and then harboring in the boxes in a clothing store," said Cowan. To eliminate the problem, Cowan explains that retailers "need a partnership from the whole retail space."

When rats have limited space, their death rates naturally go up as in-fighting and cannibalization increase. However, in a large commercial buildings, the population can grow quickly. Especially without predators or human intervention.



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You don't have to fight rodents alone

Remember, in the retail sector, the health of customers is vital to the overall health of a business, so addressing a rodent issue is a top priority.

Once a rodent infestation is identified in a retail space, it's important to inspect the entire building for entry routes and treat all units. Treating a single store will not effectively combat the problem. Instead, have a tenant meeting to educate each store on prevention measures. If a problem has already been identified, it's time to involve the landlord, as it's often the responsibility of building management to treat the whole property's exterior and coordinate a plan for controlling the rodent problem. From there, you can ensure the safety of employees and customers and gain back a positive reputation.

Abell Pest Control is one North America's leading professional pest management companies. White Papers are supplied by Abell's national Quality Assurance team.

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Sources

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