

IDENTIFYING — AND — REMOVING



MICE & RATS



FROM YOUR HOME

IN MASSACHUSETTS AND NEW HAMPSHIRE

CHRIS WILLIAMS

Identifying and Removing Mice and Rats from Your Home

From the desk of Chris M. Williams

Thank you for taking the time to download and read my e-book. I have spent the past 30 years eliminating household pests from residences in New England and it is my privilege to be able to share my experience with mice and rat infestations so that you can use the knowledge to protect yourself. Once you are able to identify the source of the infestation it is much easier to have the problem eliminated once and for all.

Again, thank you for downloading this book and I hope that the information inside proves to be useful for you.

Sincerely,

Chris M. Williams

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
Answers to Common Questions about Mice and Rats.....	3
Identifying Mice and Rats in Your Home.....	4
The General Process of Managing Mouse and Rat Infestations.....	7
How Professionals Use Baits to Control Rats and Mice.....	9
Rodent Removal in Massachusetts and New Hampshire.....	11
Conclusion.....	12
About Us.....	13

Introduction

Each year, 20% of all calls Colonial Pest Control receives for eliminating pests on personal property are related to mice and rats that have found their way into someone's home. Recognizing the frequency of the problem, I have decided to write an e-book laying out the basic information you need to know to keep these creatures from entering your home and causing you discomfort as well as posing a health hazard to your family and a threat to the structure of the building.

Read on to see how you can identify the presence of mice and rats in your home, as well as how you can remove them effectively.

Answers to Common Questions about Mice and Rats

What are they doing in my house?

Like all creatures, mice need adequate food and shelter to survive. During the colder months, your home offers protection (from predators), warmth, and food sources.

How long will it take to eliminate all of them?

When using a baiting program it depends a lot on the size of the population, but two to four weeks is the average. After identifying and eliminating access to food sources (wild bird food, pet foods, food pantry items etc.) the program will be far more effective. If the program was implemented by a professional they will follow up by performing a thorough inspection of your home to try and determine how mice and rats are entering the building. They will then seal off those openings where possible.

Are the mice going to die in my walls after a baiting program is set in place?

It is possible for the mice to move into wall

voids before they are killed by the bait. If the program was performed by a professional exterminator they are required to collect any dead animals that are in accessible locations.

A few mice, or even rats, aren't a big deal, right? Can't they just be left alone?

A 'few mice' can cause all types of property damage through gnawing and nesting activities. They can also reproduce at a fast rate, which means a few mice might turn into several mice within the span of a month or two. It is best to remove them as soon as you uncover signs of them; otherwise the infestation may cost you thousands of dollars in home repair on top of the cost of removing them from your home.

Here are some notable examples of damage our technicians have seen from various clients over the past few years: vehicle electrical systems, pool heater electronics, central air conditioning electronics, and polyethylene piping for domestic water supply, phone, cable, and internet service, and so on.

In addition, mice contaminate your home with urine and their droppings. They can carry diseases and parasites (fleas, ticks, tapeworm etc.) that may impact your family and your pets. Non-domesticated mice and rats are not your friends; they are a health hazard and should be treated accordingly.

How do mice contaminate a home with urine?

Mice do not wait for established toilet stops. They pee and poop all the time, whenever and wherever they feel the urge. They tend to dribble urine as they move along. Mice will pee next to, or even in, their own nests. One way that exterminators check for rodent

infestations is to use a black light since mouse urine glows under ultraviolet light.

Why do mice damage clothing?

Mice make use of anything in the environment that suits their needs. Soft clothing, particularly night gowns and bath robes, are easy targets for them and they will tear a hole in the cloth and drag it away to help make or insulate their nests. These nests are made up of whatever materials the female can find, such as: carpet fibers, feathers, plastic, bits of fabric, shredded paper or paper towels, toilet paper or tissues, dryer lint, cotton balls, bits of string or yarn, and grass or leaves if available.

Identifying Mice and Rats in Your Home

How can one identify the presence of mice, or rats, in a home?

While it may be difficult to see mice scurrying about the premises, because they are nocturnal and tend to stay in the walls or behind objects when they hear humans, they leave noticeable traces wherever they travel. These signs are often tangible and will help you identify the size of the infestation as well as the type. The most common signs of mice are the following:

- Mouse droppings
- Mouse Nests
- Gnawing and holes
- Rub marks
- Noises and odor

Most people are familiar with the term mouse droppings, but few people understand what they look like or what

it means when you see them. Mouse droppings are usually black and about $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch long. They are thicker in the middle, narrowing at each end. A single mouse will deposit about 70 droppings a day randomly during its travels. Fresh droppings have a putty-like consistency while old droppings are brittle. People incorrectly believe they have located the source of the infestation rather than a symptom of it when they find mouse droppings. While droppings are often found near mouse nests, which can be considered a focal point of the infestation, they are rarely found in the nests so it is important to identify the path the rodents were on when the droppings were made to locate the nest.

Mouse nests are small piles of whatever soft materials are available in the environment—shredded paper, insulation material, string,



chewed leaves, pillow stuffing, dryer lint, etc. You may find hoarded food (like stolen pet food or bird seed) in a mouse's nest. These nests are constructed in hidden, dark places that are usually within 30 feet of a food source. Kitchens are a prime location for mouse nests and they are usually found in the back corners of kitchen cabinets, behind cabinet kick plates or in wall voids, in and under stove pan drawers, and in warm places near electrical motors: behind dishwashers or refrigerators.

Holes in the baseboard of a room, or gnawed-on doors and windows, are clear indications of the presence of mice. Mice chew a lot on most anything—plasterboard,

wood, vinyl siding, and fiberboard. They have also been known to chew on electrical wires in attics, causing fires. They will chew the edges of an opening to make it larger so they can get into tight spaces. If a mouse can find an edge or corner it can bite with its teeth, it can gnaw an opening big enough to get the rest of its body through. This establishes a clear path for them to travel throughout the residence.

Because they are creatures of habit, mice travel the same routes all the time. The oils in their fur leave dark, greasy smudge marks where they brush against walls or objects. If you find mouse "holes," or the openings they are using to get into spaces,

you will find that the holes are edged with dark rub marks from repeated use. When you see droppings, look for rubbings as well because that will tell you either their origin or destination and help you locate their nest.

Each of these signs on its own will help you identify the presence of mice in your home; however, it takes an expert looking at all of them as a whole to identify the magnitude of the infestation and find a solution. Killing the mice is only treating the symptom.

How do mice and rats get into a home in the first place?

One of the most common ways mice get into homes is through the garage door. Garage doors rarely seal tightly at the bottom and sides, especially at the bottom corners. This allows the mice, who only need a hole the size of a small coin, to enter the house with minimal risk or effort. Other ways mice get inside is through vents or rotting soffits near the roofline, around openings left where utility or cable lines enter near the foundation, through gaps around lower level doors or windows especially when door thresholds or sweeps are missing, through damaged foundation or crawlspace vents, by climbing up inside porch support columns—the number of ways mice can enter is staggering and it is impossible to list them all. Needless to say they are able to get in through any damaged or degraded construction materials.

Yet mice are sometimes carried in by the cat, in a potted plant, in boxes from the shed, or in firewood. Remember, if a mouse finds an opening on your house too small for it to enter, she will gnaw at it until she can fit through. Once inside, mice can go

pretty much wherever they want in a home by moving through wall or ceiling voids, and following pipes and utility lines.

Of course, every mouse that you see in your house did not come in from the outside. Many of them were likely born in your house. All it takes is for one pregnant female to find her way inside and you'll soon have a breeding indoor population. However, if you are fairly certain the initial infestation has been eliminated and sometime later you see a mouse, then it is a clue you need to do some mouse-proofing to keep them out.

How does one prevent mice and rats from getting into their home?

In order to keep mice and rats from getting into a home it is important to take preventive measures, rather than waiting for them to appear and then dealing with the issue. These measures are often called, "mouse-proofing." Mouse-proofing your home means finding and sealing—whether through repair, replacement, or screening—all of the small openings the rodents use to make their way inside. It is not an easy job. In older homes, where construction materials have degraded or been replaced, there can be numerous points of entry for mice and rats to use.

Mice and rats can enter through openings on the outside of your house around gas lines, cable TV lines, telephone lines, etc. They can enter through openings under and around doors. They can come in through small cracks in the foundation, deteriorated mortar joints, or warped siding. They can climb exterior walls and enter through bathroom or dryer vents, as well

as the gaps around window-installed air-conditioning units.

On the other hand, if you're lucky, mouse-proofing your home could be a fairly simple task. All of your mice, for example, could

be coming in under a garage door that just needs a new seal. Either way, it may be difficult for you to identify the source of your infestation without help, so you should seek professional help if you experience a reoccurring problem.

The General Process of Managing Mouse and Rat Infestations

Once an infestation has been confirmed, what is the first thing an exterminator or pest control specialist does upon being called?

The first thing we do is a thorough inspection of the structure. We try to identify the areas where the mice are present, throughout the house. We try to find the ways the mice were able to gain access to the structure.

We find that mice enter structures most frequently around garage door frames, the bulkhead, an unfinished door in the cellar, places where the air conditioning or gas lines go through the wall, corners where there's a construction deficiency, even chimney flashing, or places up on the roof. All of these places could allow mice to enter the structure, and there are options for fixing all of them to help mouse-proof your home.

There are very small openings throughout the house that need to be paid attention to. While doing maintenance on the structure the specialist should also use bait products to decrease the population while protecting the house from

a new infestation. The main focus of our mouse control would be to knock down the population at large in the structure, and then do what we can to prevent new mice from entering.

Tips from the Professionals

Indoor Sanitation to Prevent Mice and Rats

- ❑ Don't leave food on counters, or leave used pans on the stove or in the sink overnight.
- ❑ Regularly clean stovetops, ovens, and broilers. Remove built-up grease.
- ❑ Sweep kitchen floors and clean under stoves and refrigerators often.
- ❑ Store cereals, nuts, seeds, grain and dry pet food in sealed glass, plastic or metal containers. Don't store onions, potatoes, rice, etc. in open bins.
- ❑ Don't leave pet food out overnight.
- ❑ Take trash to the dumpster or trash chute each evening. Make sure that garbage bags and cans are tightly sealed.

What does population mean in this situation? How many mice do people have in their houses?

It's difficult to ascertain the level of most populations within a structure, but a good exterminator can get a feeling for it. A large mouse population might cause a discernable odor inside the house. At this size the owner can actually smell the mice themselves.

Another sign of a large population is a significant buildup of droppings—if you're actually seeing mice run around the structure, that's a bad sign.

Mice do not like to interact with each other; they have territories within the house. It is

common to have a substantial number of mice, even if you do not see them. Once you start seeing mice running around, that indicates the presence of quite a large population.

So, what happens next? You put out bait the mice then eat. Are they going to die in the walls?

Whenever we use bait products, there is the possibility that a mouse could die in an inopportune location such as a wall, void, or up in the ceiling. There's usually a small amount of odor associated with the liquid material volatilizing from the mouse. Once the mouse dries up and the little cadaver is dry, there's really not a lot of smell after that. However, if you have a substantial amount of dead mice, there can be quite an odor.

Tips from the Professionals

Outdoor Sanitation to Prevent Mice and Rats

- ❑ Use a bird feeder with a catch tray and clean up seed under the feeder regularly. Store bird seed in a container with a tight lid.
- ❑ Pick up fallen fruit and rotting vegetables in the garden. Don't place food scraps on top of the compost pile.
- ❑ Don't store garbage outside in plastic bags (they're not mouse-proof).
- ❑ Remove piles of stone, boards, firewood, or debris that are stacked near the foundation. Stack lumber and firewood 12 inches off of the ground.
- ❑ Clear brush, weeds, and ground cover around foundation. Remove ivy from buildings.

What happens then, does the exterminator have to root around in the walls?

From time to time, we've been able to find mice in voids, maybe on a suspended ceiling or you'll find a dead one under the refrigerator. As a rule, we generally do not recommend digging into the wall to find these dead mice, because they could be anywhere but the smell is coming out of a light socket or some moldings. It may be difficult to locate the mouse without doing substantial damage to the structure in your search for it.

Are traditional snap traps an old fashioned tactic that nobody uses anymore?

Snap traps can be a very important part of a control process. Typically, they are more work to use, because once the mouse is on it, it must be removed from the trap. Some

folks prefer not to use mousetraps, because they'll actually see the dead animal.

But any kind of trapping can be used in a control management process for mice. We sometimes use that, in the case of a high population, when we want to just get as many as possible right away.

How Professionals Use Baits to Control Rats and Mice

What types of baits are irresistible for rats?

Rats are interesting little critters. They are what we call omnivores. They'll eat plant materials. They'll eat animal materials, prepared food, raw food, nuts, live insects, whatever they can find. What you are looking for in successful bait, for placement, is going to be something attractive to the rat that will keep its shape, consistency, and appeal over time. You do not want to use perishables because they will become less effective with each passing day.

Two types of baits being used right now are variations of wax block bait. The active ingredient is locked in with a waxy structure. These baits would be placed in a bait station anywhere in the house. There are several different kinds of these baits. There's one with a seed attractant or bait mixture. The animal would come and try to feed on the seeds and then consume the poison. There are several other wax block type baits with all food grade ingredients. They smell very pleasing.

This wax material protects the bait in environments with a higher moisture level, such as if you put your bait station

outside by the side of the house. Wax block baits would be the preferred bait for such a situation.

There is also a class of baits that have come out recently, which are referred to as 'soft baits.' These are baits in a little paper package. There is no wax coating to protect the bait. It looks almost like a little piece of gum and must be placed with caution in order to be effective.

Whenever using these baits, specialists are following the implicit manufacturer's directions and the state directives to make sure they are placed away from children and pets in a location that can still provide results. When we're talking about rat control, as well as choosing the right type of bait, finding the right place to put the bait is of paramount importance.

Where do you place it?

First, it should be kept away from children and pets. There are devices made to introduce bait next to a public space or a playground where there will be pets and children. These devices are referred to as bait stations. They are child and pet proof. They are comprised of a heavy plastic, resin

molded construction, which can be locked or heavily secured. These bait stations are also tied down in place so they can't be picked up, or they are placed under secure objects. There are also versions that resemble rocks so they are not as exciting or interesting to look at. They fit into the landscaping features of most yards and are indiscernible from the scenery. The main thing that these devices share is their ability to protect kids and pets from getting to the bait.

As for bait station placement, it should be put in the areas where the rat is going to be encountering it during his normal foraging activities. It is most often placed at burrows, between the rat and the food source. Instead of putting your bait placement next to the dumpster, you might put it several feet away from the dumpster or adjacent to the structure so you're not competing directly with another food source.

The soft baits are much more difficult to secure inside the exterior bait station. If there is any chance of kids and pets getting into it then it would not be a good choice. The way they are constructed, the whole system is a lot more fragile than the actual waxy bait blocks.

That being said, they are excellent for an interior wall void placement or interior bait stations that you can secure from kids and pets. Rats will consume these almost immediately. The lethal time that it takes the bait is usually three to five days. Some of these baits are single feeding baits, so the rat would just have to come to it one time and that would be his last meal. Some of these baits allow the rat to eat a couple times before he dies, depending on which

bait it is exactly, and what we're trying to accomplish.

Because rats are so smart, we try very diligently to protect our baits from human contamination. The main thing to avoid is the human scent from fingers and hands. During placement all materials of a baiting system should be handled with gloves. In addition, it is important to note that smoking or chemicals present an aversion to rats so it is important to avoid any cross-contamination.

Rats are very interesting creatures. They have something we call "new object shyness." An animal used to going around its territory has memorized the area, layout and objects present within it, so it can run from the little opening it comes out to, around the chimney, through the boxes, and back into the other hole without even thinking. It's got a muscle memory of its territory.

They're also thigmotactic. They like to be close to cracks and have at least part of their body touching something, and one of their whiskers. Their whiskers are amazing things. Rat whiskers, like dog and cat whiskers, can move forward and backwards and sense the environment. It's an articulated feeler, if you will. As a rat whips along on its normal foraging run it may jump over it or turn back if it comes to something new for the first time. The second time it sees the object it says, "Oh, I saw this before," and will go and investigate the bait. It takes them a couple of encounters to even come up to a new thing.

What else are rats afraid of?

They react to predators and motion in their environment, but if it doesn't pose itself as a

threat, and the rat is very comfortable, you could have a rat just sitting in the basement looking at you.

I cannot stress how intelligent rats truly are. Let us say you are a homeowner and you have noticed rat droppings around the house, along with the faint smell of urine. You've noticed some damage in the corner and some rat droppings, and you scurry off to the hardware store, and get your peanut butter out. You take some peanut butter, put it on a snap trap, and place it in the middle of the room. The next day you realize the peanut butter is gone, and the rat trap has been set off, but it is empty. That rat has most likely come in contact with the rat trap

but not been caught in it. He will never come near a rat trap again. He's now learned that that rat trap is dangerous.

If a rat gets on a glue board and successfully escapes, he will never go on a glue board again. Sometimes you will find one with fur on it, and the rat has escaped, so he will never touch a glue board. If you have a rat that has been heavily trapped in an area, he might not go to the bait station, because he could associate the timing of these things coming in together as a connected series of events. Thus, too much baiting will prevent a bait trap from working, which is why it is important to call an exterminator as soon as you are aware of an infestation.

Rodent Removal in Massachusetts and New Hampshire

What is the process for dead rat or mouse removal in Massachusetts and New Hampshire?

The label specifies they would like exterminators to come back and remove any dead rodents if possible. There's the rub. Often times it's not possible to remove a dead rodent. If you find one on the basement floor, we will be happy to come back and pick up and remove it as fast as possible.

Oftentimes, the rodent will die in an inopportune location such as a wall void, below a slab floor, or a crawlspace where there's no access. That's truly unfortunate. In most cases, we do not recommend digging for it because you can make an awful construction mess and not find the dead animal. Even

though it smells bad at that spot, the odor could be coming out from someplace farther way, but is centered on a break in the wall such as an outlet.

Tips from the Professionals

Mouse-Proofing Your Home

- ❑ Caulk openings around water pipes, electric wires, cables, and vents.
- ❑ Use gnaw-proof material such as steel wool, copper mesh, sheet metal, or cement to seal holes and cracks.
- ❑ Use hardware cloth to screen vents, floor drains, and other openings.
- ❑ Install door sweeps and thresholds to eliminate gaps under doors.

In our experience, it is not a good plan to dig them out unless you are sure of where they are. If there is a stain on sheetrock or you heard thrashing at a particular place in your wall for two days that abruptly stopped, then you can think about digging it out.

A rat generally weighs less than 16 ounces. The amount of odor is usually involved with the amount of water evaporating from inside its body. A mouse weighs about an ounce. Three quarters of that is water. One dead mouse in the wall in the wintertime is going to give you about three days of low level smells. If you've got a big dead rat in the wall, that might be three or four weeks.

In the summertime, as soon as an animal dies, the flies are on it. They've laid their eggs on it minutes after death. Flies are able to locate dead animals very quickly. Once that happens, little maggots appear. You get carpet beetles, silverfish, and larder beetles. All the little things that take a corpse down will start working on the dead rat or mouse.

It doesn't get bad until that membrane pops and the liquid starts to evaporate. Once that happens all that's left is a little dry husk which has no odor at all. You've just got a little pile of bones and fur. That's the end result. That will stay there in perpetuity.

There are treatments like an ozone treatment, the same one that they do for a house that's been burned, to remove the smell if you are particularly concerned about it. There are treatments specifically for dead raccoons and things that have died in the crawlspace with six pounds of liquid to evaporate. That is a much different situation, a bigger body and more material to break down. The same processes take place, but it takes much longer to complete.

In pest control, we actually view the smell of a dead rodent as success, because we know that not only has our work been worthwhile, but we've probably got the culprit right there; it means we can go back to sealing everything up and the problem's solved.

Conclusion

Although mice and rats represent a serious concern for any tenant or homeowner, the danger can be controlled if a pest control specialist is called as soon as signs are discovered in the home. The work of experience professionals can make all the difference in creating a plan to manage an infestation, helping to eliminate it in a shorter time. They will also help to identify entry points and do preventative maintenance to dramatically reduce the probability of an infestation occurring again.

About Us

Colonial Pest is one of the largest and most sought-after pest control companies in central and eastern Massachusetts, and southern New Hampshire. Our service area runs from Worcester to Boston, Framingham and Natick to Andover and Lowell, Nashua to Manchester up to Portsmouth, Fitchburg, and Leominster down to Milford and Franklin and includes all surrounding towns.

Why Choose Colonial Pest Control?

1. We know all about pests and their habits.
2. We have developed the most effective pest treatment programs available today.
3. We use cutting-edge technology and techniques to combat pest problems.
4. We have one of the best technician training programs in the pest control business.
5. We offer one of the best customer warranties you'll find anywhere.

Since 1984, Colonial has been providing effective, low-cost protection from pests for residential homeowners. Today, we have more than 8,000 satisfied residential customers under contract for preventative maintenance. And here is why our customers have remained loyal to us:

- We say what we will do, and we do what we say.
- Our technicians have years of experience, are certified, and have the support of two on-staff entomologists.
- Our pest control treatments and preventative maintenance programs are proven effective and quite affordable.

