

RODENT PREVENTION FOR FOOD BUSINESSES

KEEPING RODENTS OUT OF FOOD BUSINESSES

Rodents (rats and mice) are common pests in businesses that prepare, serve, sell, or store foods. Rodents carry many germs in their urine, feces and on their bodies that can make people sick. Rodents cause expensive damage to buildings and contribute to loss of revenue. They damage equipment (by chewing wires, which can also start fires) destroy your food products and other retail inventory. Keeping rodents out of your business not only protects public health it also provides value to your business.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PESTS IN A BUILDING OR ON A PROPERTY?

Food service operators are responsible for preventing rodents in their establishment. This includes denying rodents access to food and water. If rodents or pests move in, the business owner is responsible for making all efforts necessary to get them out and under control.

Pest management professionals are responsible for monitoring, trapping, and chemical control for rodents and insect pests. They **cannot** do all the work needed to control rodents in your facility (See section “How to work with pest management professional”).

Property owners/managers are responsible for building maintenance and rodent exclusion in the building, coordinating pest control efforts when more than one tenant is impacted and any code compliance actions on the building’s interior or exterior.

Health inspectors provide education and technical advice and ensure compliance with health codes. They can be a resource for you if you are having issues with pests, garbage, or other food safety concerns.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE IF YOU HAVE RODENTS (RATS OR MICE)

Step 1: Do not attempt to resolve the problem on your own. Call a pest management professional. Do not use rat poison in your facility. Poison should be applied by a licensed professional.

Step 2: Identify the pest. You need to know if you have rats, mice, or other pests.

Step 3: Clean and sanitize your facility. Remove food and clutter/places where rodents can hide.

Step 4: Inspect for possible entry points and make repairs to exclude rodents. Read this [Rodents and Doors: Keep Rats out!](#) article for more information.

Step 5: Ensure garbage, recycling, and food waste areas are clean. Inspect and replace damaged containers. Report garbage issues and illegal dumping to your city.

Step 6: Work with your pest management technician and health inspector to create a plan to get rid of the rodents.

HOW TO WORK WITH YOUR PEST MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL

Your pest control technician shouldn't just be setting traps. They should also be giving you advice and recommendations that you need to act on. They may recommend repairs to keep rodents out, deep cleaning, sanitation, or decluttering in certain areas. **This is work you need to do for the pest management professional's work to be effective.**

The pest control technician should:

- Communicate with you to advise and provide recommendations at every visit.
- Target nesting and harborage/places where rodents may be hiding. Be strategic.
- Exclusion work, finding and fixing the places rodents can get inside, should be part of the plan.
- Focus on prevention and use non-toxic methods when possible.

Ensure your pest management professional is licensed with the Washington State Dept. of Agriculture. You can look that up online using this search tool: [License Search | Washington State Department of Agriculture](#)

WHEN TO ENGAGE YOUR BUILDING OWNER OR PROPERTY MANAGER

Rodents can be challenging pests to address once they become established on a property. They can nest in the walls, basements, crawl spaces, and attics. Once nested, they can multiply quickly and do a lot of damage to the structure of the building. Outside, they can use cracks and crevices along foundations to build burrows. They can enter buildings from the exterior through doors, windows, and gaps or holes in the eaves and the roof. In mixed-use or conjoined buildings, they can quickly travel between units and cause problems for many businesses.

Talk to your landlord or property manager about building-wide concerns, or concerns impacting multiple tenants. For example, contact your landlord or property manager if:

- Rodents are nesting in ceilings or walls. (you might hear them)
- Rodents are accessing food in one unit and causing damage in another.
- Rodents have compromised the foundation.
- Rodents are entering from a shared common area like a lobby, flat roof, or loading dock.

PUBLIC HEALTH RESOURCES TO PREVENT RODENT INFESTATIONS IN YOUR FOOD BUSINESS

Food and Facilities: Contact your inspector at 206-263-9566 or online at www.kingcounty.gov/foodsafety

Seattle Rodent Program (City of Seattle only) 206-263-9566 or online at www.kingcounty.gov/rats

Online resources and webinars:

[Managing Rodents with Integrated Pest Management and New Technologies \(youtube.com\)](#)

[There's a Fly in My Soup - Integrated Pest Management in Restaurants - YouTube](#)

[How to manage rodents in food facilities - YouTube](#)

[The 10 Most Essential Items for Effective Rodent Control with Bobby Corrigan - Bing video](#)

[PCT Magazine: Rodents and Doors: Keep Rats out!](#)

[Dumpsters: A Magnet for Rodents - Pest Control Technology \(pctonline.com\)](#)

CHECKLISTS PREVENT RODENTS IN FOOD BUSINESSES

Keep your kitchen clean! Sanitation is one of the most important things you can do to prevent pests.

- Do not store food where rodents can access it. Cover foods stored in walk-in coolers.
- Ensure dirty dishes do not stay out overnight.
- Do not leave out open garbage inside overnight.
- Clean out floor drains daily. Do not leave food in them.
- Keep floors, counters, and storage spaces clean. Schedule deep cleaning and move equipment to clean up food, grease, and waste.
- Inspect for plumbing leaks or condensation that can provide water for rodents.
- Keep your waste bins closed and the garbage area clean. Maintain your grease bin to avoid drips.
- Clean grease build-up in the kitchen. Grease has strong food smells and rats like to eat it.
- Clean and sanitize areas contaminated by rat feces and urine daily.
- Don't let your garbage, food waste, or grease bins feed rodents.

Keep rodents out - exclusion!

- Inspect for access points. Look for gnaw marks or rub (grease) marks in areas where rats are seen. Sometimes these markings may lead you to where they are coming and going from.
- Seal or caulk openings around doors, windows, baseboards, pipes, etc. Seal any holes and gaps that are ¼ inch or larger.
- Cover floor drains with a grate or screen.
- Install self-closing doors and keep doors closed. Close windows and screen doors.
- Inspect walk-in cooler door seals and ensure they are not damaged. Replace seals if needed.
- Eliminate clutter and unnecessary items. This includes items stored on top of equipment.
- Clean shelves and pallets: move them, clean them, and put them back in place.
- Keep your waste bins closed and replace them if they become damaged.

Trap them! Establish a trapping plan with your pest control technician.

- Use the right size trap - small traps for mice and large traps for rats. Set traps in places where rodents are going. If they are going on high shelves, set the traps there!
- Set traps inside before closing for the day. Use a dab of peanut butter or other food. If they are not taking food bait, tie a piece of string to the trap. They may take the string bait as nesting material. See this handout on how to set traps: [How to use rodent traps and bait stations \(kingcounty.gov\)](https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dph/health-safety/environmental-health/getting-rid-of-rats-mice).
- Dispose of dead rodents daily. Visit <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dph/health-safety/environmental-health/getting-rid-of-rats-mice> for precautions on cleaning up after rodents.

We do not recommend using glue boards.

Hire a Pest Control Service!

Do not use poison baits inside your business! Over-the-counter rodent poison/baits are prohibited for use in indoor spaces and food service establishments. **Any poison-based control should be done by a professional and in compliance with applicable pesticide laws and regulations.**