



## Nashoba Associated Boards of Health

Serving the towns of Ashburnham, Ashby, Ayer, Berlin, Bolton, Boxborough, Dunstable, Groton, Harvard, Lancaster, Littleton, Lunenburg, Pepperell, Shirley, Stow, Townsend, and the community of Devens, in partnership with your local elected Board of Health.

### Rat Control & Prevention in the Nashoba Region

Adapted from Town of Sutton, MA Board of Health- [Rodent Control Document](#)

Rats have become an increasing problem in multiple urban, suburban, and rural Massachusetts communities. Rat infestations are a public health issue because rats can destroy and contaminate food and other household materials. Rats can also transmit viruses, bacteria and parasites to humans. Everyone must do their part to control the problem!

Here is what you can do to help prevent and address a rat problem in your neighborhood- the following tips may also help to control the presence of other rodents such as mice and chipmunks as well.

#### Learn about rats and their habits:

Most rats in the Northeast are Norway Rats (*Rattus norvegicus*). They generally live for a year and a female can have up to seven litters of 6-12 “pups” in their lifetime. Rats burrow into the ground, often under buildings or other structures. They usually live close to food and water sources. Rats are agile jumpers and climbers, and they can gnaw through many kinds of materials, including glass and brick. Rats are nimble and can fit through the smallest of spaces.



Norway Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*)

You can check your property for rats by keeping an eye out for their burrows, droppings (about ¾ inch long), gnaw marks, tracks, trails, and nests. Keep an eye on trash barrels for evidence of gnawing on the bottom or sides.



Rat droppings vs. mouse droppings, courtesy town of Sutton, MA Board of Health

#### Be “rodent-smart”:

- Use rodent-proof containers (heavy duty plastic or metal) with tight-fitting lids for garbage. Do NOT store or put trash out for pickup in bags only.
- Wash trash and recycling containers and their surroundings frequently.
- Use rodent-proof containers to store food and pet food (including chicken feed and bird seed.)

(Cont'd next page)



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### **Be “rodent-smart” cont’d:**

- Clean up after pets- rats will feed on leftover pet food and even pet waste.
- Limit use of bird feeders and clean up spills daily.
- Rats will eat fresh fruit and vegetables, so if you grow produce be aware of rodent activity in your garden and yard. Keep your garden and composter free from rodents:
  1. Maintain the right ratio: your compost bin should always be 3 parts “brown” to 1 part “green.”
  2. Always cover food scraps in a composter with leaves, paper towels, or other “brown” carbon materials. Rinse out egg shells to avoid odors that appeal to rodents. Meat, bones, fat, dairy, or foods cooked with oil or butter should not be placed in compost bin.
  3. Pick up fallen fruit and vegetables.
  4. Keep your composter at least 1.5 feet away from any wall and the area around it free from weeds or tall grass.
  5. Keep your composter moist and active; turn frequently.
  6. Tightly shut the lid on the compost bin.
  7. Use ½-inch wire mesh to place underneath your composter to prevent burrowing.
- Plug holes in floors and walls with wire mesh (copper, stainless or aluminum.) For holes inside, cover the mesh with spackle, plaster or hardening sealant.
- Repair broken windows, doors, screens, and roofs. Tear down or repair dilapidated fences, sheds, and garages.
- Remove abandoned vehicles, appliances, construction debris, woodpiles, and tires from yards.
- Routinely mow lawns and trim shrubbery.

### **Organize your neighbors and friends:**

- Work with your neighbors to rid your neighborhood of rats. Everyone must do their part to control these pests.
- Consider creating a rodent watch group in your neighborhood to identify and correct areas that may be providing food or harborage for rodents.

### **Exterminate:**

- If you are concerned with the rodent population on your property, you can hire a licensed pest management professional (request to see their Massachusetts License), who incorporates Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices. Some rodent poisons (rodenticides) can have devastating effects on the local ecosystem and wildlife and pose dangers to children and pets, so it’s important to explore all options prior to choosing rodenticide.

*Document last updated July 2023*