



MECKLENBURG COUNTY Health Department

RODENT FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

May 2004

Q. Is a mouse a baby rat?

No. A mouse and a rat are two different animals. They may look and behave similarly but a mouse will not grow up to be a rat. Usually rats and mice will not inhabit the same area due to the dominance of the rats over the mice. The most common rodents in Mecklenburg County are house mice, Norway rats, Cotton rats, and white-footed mice. Only the first are considered 'true' public health pests

Q. Why do the rats dig holes (burrows)?

Rats, particularly Norway rats, will dig regularly and they use these burrows as homes. They dig out an area underground creating space to live, feed, breed, etc. These burrows are rarely underground tunnels that surface elsewhere on the property although they may have an escape hole. Multiple openings usually means that there are two or more separate burrows and subsequently colonies or populations.

Q. If there is one rat, doesn't that mean there are more around that I don't see?

The number of rats on a property is hard to establish. Norway rats sometimes travel alone from place to place; this behavior is referred to as nomadic. However, when a colony is established, estimates can be based on counting the number of burrows. Each burrow may house between 1-5+ rats, but keep in mind that this does not account for any rats that may be living in the area surrounding your property.

Q. Does a vacant house attract rats?

No. Rats need a continuous source of food. If there is no food source then the rats will move on. Typically, there is no source of food in abandoned houses. High grass and overgrown vegetation do not cause rats. These areas may be home to wildlife in general. Items such as junk vehicles, woodpiles, discarded furniture and appliances also do not cause rat problems although they may use it as harborage if there is food nearby.

Q. What should I do about rats in my vegetable garden/overgrown field?

In many cases, these rats can be Cotton rats or white-footed mice although Norway rats can exist here. Our program can only bait for Norway or roof rats. You can call the NC Wildlife Resources Commission @ 1-800-662-7137 for advice on how to control these animals.

Q. What should I do when I see rats eating out of my dog's food bowl?

Most rodents love dog food. No matter where the rats are coming from (e.g. your neighbor's yard, your yard, adjacent areas), the rats are there because they have found food. You should immediately remove any excess food that is sitting out. Only feed your dog a sufficient amount of food which they will eat in 30 minutes or less and then remove what is not eaten. This gives your dog enough time to eat without making it available to the rats. Be sure to store the bag of food in a sealable container. It is important to continue proper dog feeding and food storage even after the rats are gone.

Q. If I have a rat problem, can I just place rat poison around my house?

Generally speaking the answer is no. You must read and follow the instructions on the package. You can only place bait where Norway rats or house mice can eat it. If outside the house, this usually means either a tamper-resistant bait box or in a locked, securable area like a crawlspace area of the house. If you have read the bait label instructions and have

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questions, you need to contact the North Carolina Department of Agriculture at 1-(919)-733-6100.

Other control methods include snap traps and glueboards. Snap traps should only be used inside the home unless it can be secured such that only your target pest is likely to get to the trap.

Q. What do I do when the bait is being eaten off the snap trap but the rodent is not being caught?

Position the snap trap so that the baited end of each trap is placed perpendicular to the wall. Rodents generally travel with their bodies against a wall for protection. The use of 3 or more snap traps is recommended in problem areas. It may be necessary to bait a rat trap without setting the trap and allow the bait to be eaten a couple of times. Then set the trap with more bait. Rats tend to shy away from new objects so this method gets them accustomed to the trap. Mice are more inquisitive than rats, so pre-baiting is less likely to be needed.

Q. How can I keep rodents out of my house?

First, survey our residence to identify any and all openings a ¼" or larger, generally within 2 feet of the foundation, which need to be 'rodent-proofed. This is large enough for a mouse to get in. Although it is difficult to mouse-proof a house, any rodent-proofing measures taken are helpful. If you can find the interior entry point used by mice (i.e. a hole in wall behind the stove, a gap around the kitchen sink drain pipe at its wall junction), then seal the opening as soon as possible. A wood or metal plate can be used to plug the hole(s) temporarily.

Secondly, ensure that all garbage, food products (EXTERIOR-gardens, grass or bird seed, dog food; INTERIOR-general drygoods), etc. are properly disposed and or stored and that all areas, inside and out, are kept clean.. As stated above, if there are no food sources, rats and mice will likely seek other areas.

Q. What if my dog eats the poison or a dead rat which was eaten the poison?

The bait is purposely placed in a tamper-proof bait box to prevent this. If a current anti-coagulant poison such as Weatherblok-XT is used, the amount of poison one rat must eat to suffer a lethal dose is very small. Thus, a dog would have to eat numerous dead (poisoned) rats in order to be effected. The bait box should have a label on the top that lists the name of the poison and its poison control number. If the Health Department places any poisons, information concerning the poison/bait is always given to the resident at the time of the initial baiting. In case of an accidental ingestion (i.e. the poison being eaten by the family pet or person), seek medical attention at once. Present the bait label to the veterinarian or physician. Many baits actually contain a bittering agent which is meant to prevent this from happening.

For questions or comments, contact 704-336-5101