

Rat Basics

The rat originated in Central and Southeast Asia, but has spread from there to every corner of the Earth. They live everywhere people do. It is estimated that rats destroy one-fifth of the food produced every year. They spread disease, and, because of their constant gnawing, they cause damage to homes and businesses. They are often responsible for electrical fires. Rats have a territory of anywhere from 100 to 300 feet, which they explore daily. They tend to follow the same paths, or *runs*, over and over again.

The two main types of rats that cause problems are the Roof rat (*Rattus rattus*) and the Norway rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), also called the sewer, wharf, or brown rat. In Kansas City, the Norway Rat is the main problem. Norway rats weigh about 10-17 ounces, have a body between 7-10 inches long and a tail between 6-8.5 inches.

Signs

Some common signs that you have a rat problem:

- Gnawings
- Sightings
- Droppings
 - Blunt, cylindrical droppings about 3/4 of an inch long
- Sounds (scratching, scraping)
- Smells
- Runs
 - Shiny, oily, and or dirty pathways next to walls, gnawed openings, and pipes
- Dogs or cats becoming unexpectedly agitated

Prevention

Rats need three things to survive, and will be a problem until these three things are no longer available: food, water, and shelter. If you have a rat problem, take the following steps to get rid of the rats; if your neighbor has a rat problem, taking the following steps can keep their rat problem from becoming *your* rat problem:

- Food (anything rats might consider food):
 - Keep food in galvanized metal containers
 - Keep trash and garbage cans in tightly covered metal containers
 - Pick up garbage and trash in yards immediately
 - Remove pet food after the pet has finished eating, and pick up pet droppings
 - Clean spilled seed from under bird feeders
 - Wipe any spilled food off the clothing and faces of babies and bedridden adults
 - NEVER leave a bottle with a baby in the crib overnight
- Water:
 - Repair leaking pipes
 - Don't let rainwater collect in containers, window wells, etc.
 - Repair broken sewer pipes leading from your home
- Shelter:
 - Clean up debris like abandoned cars, used appliances, brush piles, etc.
 - Cut any high weeds, especially around house foundations
 - Store lumber at least 18 inches from the ground
 - Clean out basement and attics
 - Seal off openings in foundations, retaining walls, and basements
 - Replace all broken windows
 - Use concrete or metal when rat-proofing; while rats can burrow through concrete, it is much easier for them to gnaw through wood.