

# Are Rats Worth the Poison?

By Adriane Pollard  
Manager of Environmental Services

Spring seems to be the time of year when residents notice more rats lurking near sources of food and cover in our neighbourhoods. While 2020 may be The Year of Rat, Covid-19 may also play a role in this year's proliferation of rodents. There are local reports of rats venturing further afield due to fewer scraps generated by the food service industry. Piles of garden waste may also be a factor as municipal drop offs were temporarily closed.

Whatever the cause, managing the rat population in Greater Victoria will always be a reality and a responsibility of land owners. Urban rats are here because they arrived with humans from Europe and Asia. They are very successful at scavenging, surviving, and spreading. They are doing what they do best but it isn't always appreciated. The first line of defence is to change or get rid of what is attracting the rats on your property. But, despite your best efforts, you may find reducing their population is necessary.

Finding a method that is humane as well as safe for pets and wildlife is important. Humane standards for rat control do not include glue traps, poison, or other home remedies. Whether it is set up by yourself or a professional, a spring trap is the most humane and safe option but it is very important to ensure that wildlife, pets, and people are not inadvertently snapped. Tubing, locked boxes, confined spaces, and other methods are available.

As a society, using fewer pesticides (which includes rodenticides) has been identified as an important goal. Did you know that owls can be poisoned by eating a dying poisoned rat? Even if the product says it does not contain enough poison to effect wildlife, the poison can accumulate in the predator's body or cause symptoms that lead to the death of wildlife. Ironically, owls are very successful predators of rodents that should be encouraged—not poisoned. Other raptors, native wildlife such as Raccoons, and even our pets can become inadvertently poisoned.



Currently, local governments like Saanich do not have a role in regulating the sale or use of rodenticides, this has to happen at the provincial level. Saanich can, however, review our own practices and raise awareness about the issue of rodenticides. On Monday July 13 of this year, a unanimous council decision supported a ban on the municipal use of anticoagulant rodenticides and asked staff to educate the community on their harmful impacts. For more information on controlling rats both humanely and without risking wildlife, please visit these websites:

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/getting-rid-rodents>

<https://spca.bc.ca/ways-to-help/take-action/urban-wildlife/humane-rodent-control/>