



City of Cambridge

Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

December 11, 2023

To the Honorable, the City Council:

In response to Awaiting Report #23-57 which requested a report on the progress of the City's rodent control programs, the Inspectional Services Department and the Department of Public Works report the following:

The City continues to be committed to confronting the problem of rodent activity and infestation. ISD addresses issues on private property. ISD oversees rodent control associated with construction projects, sanitary inspections at food establishments, dumpster ordinance enforcement. DPW addresses issues in public areas.

Private Property Rodent Control

ISD continues to contract with Secured Environments to provide Private property rodent control for up to 60 days at qualifying properties. The program continues to :

- Be Free to tenants / owners to apply and receive service.
- Provides ISD pre inspection, initial service, 3 follow up visits, and ISD post inspection.
- Available to residential properties with 4 or fewer units
- Provide free professional IPM report and recommendations.

Since the last report 246 properties have applied and 229 have been approved. ISD has completed 402 inspections at the properties. Secured Environments has provided 714 service visits.

The number of resident-related complaints regarding the contractor's services have greatly reduced with the addition of Secured Environments. Secured Environments have promptly answered all resident inquiries upon receipt of detailed inspection reports given to each applicant after every service. Each applicant receives a detailed inspection checklist specific to their property with recommendations and is also given follow-up inspection reports with information about how much rodent activity was found. Given rodenticide concerns, ISD allows residents to choose if they do not want rodenticide used on their property. Since the last report, 25 % of residents have selected to have snap traps placed at their property, while 75 % selected to have the contractor choose the method they see fit. ISD has begun to allow Secured Environments to perform CO treatments on a limited basis when allowable in the Private property program. Secured Environments has done 5 CO treatments under the private property program.



This program has proven very successful in engaging more residents in rodent control efforts to help educate them about many of the common causes of rodent issues on properties. The access to private properties that ISD has gained has been very helpful and increased face-to-face interactions with residents allowing staff to share simple tips like the importance of eliminating food and water sources on properties. Both staff and residents report these interactions have been very helpful in providing important information to many residents who would otherwise not have reached out to the city for assistance. Several neighborhood groups have participated together, maximizing the effectiveness in reducing activity and concerns. ISD will be looking for improvements that can be made to the Private Property program (more education and interaction - less pesticides)

Smart box and smart pipe program

Smart boxes are electrocution traps placed above ground. Rats are caught, electrocuted and contained within the trap. The servicing company is notified electronically and sends a technician to empty the unit. Catches are tracked and reported to us weekly.

Smart Pipes are placed in the sewer system and sense rat presence within the trap and kills the rat. Total kills are tracked and reported to us weekly. The rat is disposed of with regular operation of the sewer system.

As part of our ongoing commitment to reducing rodenticide use, we continue to contract with Modern Pest Control who is the only permitted provider of Smart technology products.

The city currently has 64 smart boxes deployed and 27 smart pipes deployed. They have recorded a total of 2440 rats eliminated since the beginning of the program.

The boxes and pipes are deployed based on need for control in an area where public space may be contributing to or the source of activity.

We are looking to continue the Smart program while looking for lower cost alternatives that produce the same / similar results. We are considering limited Private property deployment when needed based on activity, effect on neighborhood, and availability of equipment.

The boxes and pipes are monitored by the Project Coordinator and repositioned as needed. All data from the Smart program is uploaded to Open Data portal under the title "Smart Rat Boxes".

Status of Project Coordinator position

Dave Power of the Inspectional Services Department has filled the Project Coordinator Environmental Health position.

The duties of the position will include overseeing the efforts of Inspectional Services (enforcement, SeeClickFix, and Private Property program) and Public Works (public spaces, smart program) as well as liaison with any other department as needed for advice, recommendations or assistance pertaining to rodent control.

Dave will undertake additional outreach efforts coordinating neighborhood meetings and "walk arounds" with the help of interested residents. He will meet with any individual resident or organization about their home or neighborhood and help work towards reducing rodent impact.

There are additional educational and outreach efforts being planned. Including routine neighborhood meetings

Dave will assist with website updating and additional rodent page info and resources.

Dave has a firm understanding of the risks of rodenticides and is well-versed in IPM (Integrated Pest Management) where making physical changes to structures and environments and eliminating food sources are the best ways to combat rodents.

Dave has a strong network established within the city and participates in the Rodent Task Force made up of stakeholders within the city as well as larger organizations operating in the city. He coordinates with Somerville Public Health officers when a cooperative effort is needed in neighborhoods that straddle the Somerville Cambridge border.

Dave is part of the group led by Sam Lipson of Cambridge Public Health researching the viability of infertility treatments as part of rodent control efforts.

He is maintaining his State pesticide Certification. He attends trade meetings in the pest control industry and maintains industry contacts outside of the city to stay up to date on new technologies and developments.

Dave will assist in implementing and overseeing our internal Carbon Monoxide burrow treatment program as well as outsourcing that work when needed. (non-pesticide)

Having one individual coordinating our efforts and getting all departments on the same page will have a positive impact.

Rodent Complaint data

While the ability for residents to report rodent issues online, via an app, by email, or over the phone has been available for many years, the City streamlined how we receive and document rodent complaints beginning in January 2020. This was done to ensure all complaints are logged in SeeClickFix (SCF) to have better data to monitor locations of reports and track the number of issues year over year. Below are some data from the past 6 years:

- 2018** - 219 reports (*before all requests logged in SeeClickFix*)
- 2019** - 235 reports (*before all requests were logged in SeeClickFix*)
- 2020** - 739 reports
- 2021** - 784 reports
- 2022** -- 689 reports
- 2023** (11/1/22 - 11/1/23) 396 reports

While citizen Reports aren't a perfect indication of activity, the numbers have gone down significantly. It is premature to say that it is a direct result of our increased efforts, but it is indicative of some impact, and we will strive to continue to push reports down.

ISD response data

Even with the increase in reports, the ISD has kept up with demand and better improved on how quickly an inspector is able to receive a complaint, review the information, and inspect a property. Below are some data for the past 6 years showing how many days, on average, it took ISD to respond to a rodent complaint on private property and close the complaint by contacting the property owner or initiating a code violation case:

·2018 -	9.8 days
·2019 -	10.8 days
·2020 -	6.8 days
·2021 -	3.5 days
·2022 -	3.9 days
·2023 -	4.2 days

Inspectional Services' Inspection and Permitting Program Related to Rodents

ISD is responsible for following up on rodent issues/complaints on private property. Their Housing and Sanitary Inspectors work with businesses to ensure their trash and dumpsters are properly maintained, enforce ordinances to regulate dumpsters, use strategies to identify problem areas by doing sweeps to tag at-risk conditions, mapping of complaints, and enhanced staff training on rodent behavior and control, and handle the bulk of reports of rodent sightings the City receives to investigate possible causes.

Inspectors respond to the specific address and assess rodent activity and make recommendations to the management company, property owners or tenants. While there, they will expand the inspection to neighboring properties or businesses to try to identify other contributing factors to rodent activity in the area. Inspectors attend neighborhood meetings to meet with residents, answer questions, and hand out brochures related to preventing rodent activity and have arranged neighborhood meetings/walks to review active sites and discuss best practices. ISD staff also do proactive neighborhood sweeps to identify problem areas and leave brochures and door hangers with information on best practices in preventing rodent activity that also includes contact information to reach out to the department for an inspection and other help.

ISD works with large property management companies across the city to coordinate and educate on preventing activity, and all restaurant Sanitary Inspections include monitoring for rodent activity inside and outside of the establishment.

Requests for Demolition Permits are first reviewed by Housing Inspectors to confirm rodent baiting is done prior to the start of demolition and throughout the entirety of the project. Exterminators are required to email all reports to ISD for monitoring. Inspectors also visit larger non-demolition construction sites when reports are received about rodent activity. If there is evidence of activity, contractors are ordered to exterminate and send reports to ISD.

Rodent Task Force

The City Manager's Office, Public Health, ISD (ISD), and Public Works (DPW) departments hold regular internal Rodent Taskforce meetings with additional stakeholders from Cambridge Public Schools, Cambridge Housing Authority, MIT, and Harvard University to discuss better coordination efforts to address rodents and will continue to enforce ordinances related to dumpsters, curbside trash, and private property cleanliness issues.

Solid Waste Management

DPW oversees all of the city's Solid Waste programs. This includes curbside trash, recycling, and compost collection as well as street cleaning. Through the use of in-house compliance officers, DPW inspects all of the city trash routes daily to insure proper setout of barrels and adherence to the City's trash and recycling ordinances. They also work closely with ISD inspectors on improperly stored trash on private property.

Compost Program

Because food scraps make up 30% of household trash, separating them out significantly reduces trash and gets food scraps out of landfills to protect the climate. Composting also helps the City combat the rodent issue. Compost carts have locks or latches which secure food waste. Both trash and compost carts are made of thicker plastic than most barrels available in retail stores. The curbside compost bins provided by the city are made of a durable plastic and a secure locking lid that is resistant to pests. While the main goal of compost program is to reduce waste and protect the climate by reducing potent greenhouse gas emissions at landfills, an added benefit is the removal of a major food source for rodents from the general waste stream. By removing this food source and placing it in a secure locking container, we can better limit rodents' access to food.

Standardized Trash Carts

Last year DPW distributed standardized trash carts city wide. These trash carts are another piece of the puzzle to address rodent control and prevention in Cambridge. To help reduce rodents in your neighborhood, the city encouraged residents to use these new trash carts and avoid placing trash in bags on the curb whenever possible, keep the lids closed tightly on the new trash carts, and separate food waste from your trash by participating in the City's free curbside compost program. The goal of the Standard Trash Cart program is to improve:

- o Rodent control and public health. The new carts will reduce easy access to food for rodents.
- o Worker Safety, the trucks can mechanically lift and empty the new carts. This will reduce lifting impacts on DPW staff.
- o Sidewalk accessibility. Lids are attached to the cart and will not fall on the sidewalk. Larger buildings will need fewer carts because their carts will be bigger (65 gallons instead of 50 gallons). This leads to fewer sidewalk obstructions.

Big Belly Solar Trash Compactors

Over the last decade, DPW has been replacing standard open top public area litter bins with Big Belly solar compactors and recyclers. The Big belly solar trash compactor is a smart, solar-powered, compacting waste receptacle. This compacting model holds three to four times real capacity over an average traditional waste bin. It is equipped with sensors that monitor and report fullness levels and collection activity. It harvests solar power to compact waste and communicate its real-time status. Because these units are fully enclosed, we have found them to be effective in controlling rodents particularly in business districts and parks. These units are currently specified in all city construction projects and DPW is swapping out traditional barrels for Big Belly units on an annual basis.

Traditional Baiting, trapping, and monitoring

Project coordinator responds to rodent issues on public property, evaluates causes of issues and makes IPM recommendations. Rodenticide usage on public property has been reduced by deploying smart programs as well as other trapping strategies. Project coordinator bridges the gap between ISD and DPW regarding, sewers, broken sewer lines, and any openings in the public way when evidence of rodents exists.

Carbon Monoxide treatments

City staff through a private contractor continue to utilize Carbon Monoxide (CO) burrow treatments as needed and appropriate in public spaces. Public Works has purchased a Burrow RX burrow treatment machine. DPW and ISD are working on best practices and procedures to have city staff use the burrow RX machine. The goal is to be operational by the start of next year.

Rodent detection and abatement dogs

On a few occasions, Public Works has worked with a contractor who utilizes dogs as a detection and control procedure. Their use is limited and dictated by surroundings, level of activity and accessibility to the rodents.

Rodent infertility treatments

The rodent task force has discussed infertility treatments as a means of rodent control. Under Public Health department's Sam Lipson, the task force have formed a Rat Fertility Control study group. The group is currently meeting regularly to develop a trial in conjunction with Somerville to study the efficacy of this treatment for our combined cities. While in the early stages, the group is making progress and hope to have a trial in place next year.

Resident Resources

A rodent resources website is available at www.cambridgema.gov/rodents and physical information was developed, updated, and is routinely provided to residents by ISD staff with information on how to prevent and spot rodent activity around their property. The website will be refreshed and updated at the beginning in the new year. Outreach through neighborhood meetings will continue to provide residents with an understanding of rat behavior and how to detect / discourage.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yi-An Huang', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Yi-An Huang
City Manager