

# Pests Under Fire

**Best practices for pest-proofing your community.**

BY MISSY HENRIKSEN

**A**ccording to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), “fire departments responded to 46,500 reported home structure fires involving electrical failure or malfunction in 2010. These fires resulted in 420 civilian deaths, 1,520 civilian injuries and \$1.5 billion in direct property damage.”

These alarming statistics include fires treated in multifamily housing and, while the specific causes of such fires vary, it’s estimated that rodents are responsible for 20 percent to 25 percent of all fires of unknown causes because of their propensity for chewing electrical wiring and gas lines.

Recent news reports from Franklin, N.H., and Phoenix, Ariz., suggest electrical wiring damaged by rodents was to blame for fires in multifamily communities in these cities. With such overwhelming indication of the destructive nature of rodents, it is imperative facility managers take aggressive steps to keep rats, mice and other vermin out of their properties.

## Types of Rodents

While no rodent is welcome in a home setting, there are certain species more likely than others to set up residence in an apartment building or complex. The house mouse is the most common rodent reported in residential settings. Treatment of house mice infestations can be particularly challenging in multifamily housing because of the vast



amount of hiding space such structures offer to mice, the lack of consistent sanitary practices exercised by residents and, for some, the lack of or failure to adhere to a rodent control program. In addition, as house mice breed quickly, a small infestation can grow into a large problem if not addressed promptly.

Norway and roof rats are also known to infest multifamily dwellings. Despite what many believe or may want to believe, there is no neighborhood that is immune to rats—though urban areas are certainly more susceptible to invasions by these pests because of infrastructure



issues such as old sewage systems, waste disposal practices, poor drainage, etc.

### **Harborage Spots**

Like all living creatures, pests require food, water and shelter for their survival. Rodents are no exception. Their entrance into our personal space will be for any or all of these reasons. While most frequently problematic in the fall when temperatures drop and natural food sources become scarce, rodent activity takes place year-round.

House mice are known to enter buildings through:

- Gaps surrounding utility pipes or clothes dryer vents;
- Ground floor doors left ajar;
- Garbage shoots; and
- Cracks and crevices larger than 1/4 inch in a building's structure.

Norway rats typically achieve entry through:

- Gaps and cracks along building foundations;
- Wood piles along buildings;
- Cracks and crevices larger than 1/2 inch in building structures;

**Some rats require only a 1/2-inch hole to infiltrate a structure. House mice need just a 1/4-inch opening, which is smaller than the size of these coins.**



- Cluttered or garbage-filled alleys; and
- Toilet bowl or uncapped drains (mostly in cities with large infestations in the sewer).

Roof rats, a species most often found in vegetation-rich neighborhoods older than 10 years, infiltrate communities through:

- Apartment balconies, particularly those with pet food bowls or birdfeeders;
- Trees and tall shrubbery; and
- Improperly sealed attic vents.

## Eliminating Entry

For multifamily community managers to rodent-proof their buildings, it is important to recognize the spots that provide easy access to rodents and attend to their elimination:

1. Trim tree branches to 6 feet back from the building.
2. Install door sweeps if door thresholds have a gap larger than 1/4 inch wide.
3. Seal dryer vents.
4. Seal cracks and crevices in building foundations, as mice can enter through holes the size of a dime.
5. Seal utility and electrical line holes to the outside.
6. Install metal rat guards around pipes.
7. For those in cities with heavy rat pop-

ulations in the sewers, install rodent proofing devices in toilets to prevent rat entry.

8. Pest-proof vent openings.
9. Ensure fascia boards are tightly adjoined to the property structure.
10. Clean and maintain trash areas.
11. Prohibit residents from leaving pet food and birdfeed on balconies and discourage them from leaving human food out unattended, as well.
12. Ensure gutters and drainage sys-

tems are functioning properly and there are no back-ups.

While much of this advice is consistent with good upkeep and repair practices, these same steps go a long way in providing a protective barrier against rats and mice. It is important to eliminate the origin of rodent invasions, as mice will often leave a pheromone trail that will be used by future interlopers in identifying access locations.

## INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT

### *Description*

In this one-hour video-based course on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) presented by NAAEI and Orkin, property managers will gain an understanding of environmentally conscious ways to keep pests out of their properties. Learn about the basics of IPM, common multifamily pests, key areas to prevent pests on apartment properties, green treatments available and tools for communicating with residents.

### *Target Audience*

Property Management Professionals, including Onsite Property Managers, Leasing Consultants, Maintenance Professionals, Regional Managers, Corporate Executives, and Legal Professionals.

### *Course Length*

The Webinar will last approximately one hour.

### *Cost*

\$29.99 Members; \$49.99 Non-members

### *Continuing Education*

NAAEI Designates will earn 1 CEC for taking this course. The course also translates into one credit towards NAAEI's Credential for Green Property Management.



## Rodent-Proof Wiring

As rodents can chew through critical wiring and cause an arc fault that, in turn, can cause a fire, the Consumer Product Safety Commission has addressed this problem by recommending the instal-

lation of Arc-Fault Circuit Interrupters (AFCIs) during construction. Many jurisdictions are now requiring AFCIs in new construction, as these circuit breakers can detect potentially dangerous arcs and disconnect power before a fire can start.

Rodents are responsible for an estimated 20 percent to 25 percent of all fires of unknown causes. They're also known to harbor diseases and disease-carrying parasites.

## Pest Control Plan

Because of the damage rodents (and other pests) can cause, as well as the diseases they carry and spread, it is important that property managers work with a pest management professional to prevent an infestation and address any current issues. Many pest management professionals will work with property managers to conduct a pest exclusion and analysis of conducive conditions, or a thorough Integrated Pest Management inspection.

Regarding rodent control, trained and licensed professionals will devote the necessary time and resources required to identify long-term solutions to mice and rat problems, not just control the immediate situation. For instance, they will look at historical infestations to determine pathways rodents may be using between apartments. They will create rodent sighting activity logs, complete thorough inspections, and provide

### BED 'BUG-INAR'

#### *Description*

NAAEI, in partnership with Orkin, hosted a "Bed Bug-inar" on how to identify and prevent bed bug infestations, as well as what to do if bed bugs are found in an apartment.

#### *Target Audience*

Property Management Professionals, including Onsite Property Managers, Leasing Consultants, Maintenance Professionals, Regional Managers, Corporate Executives and Legal Professionals.

#### *Course Length*

The course is approximately 45 minutes.

#### *Cost*

\$29.99 Members; \$39.99 Non-members

#### *Speaker*

Dr. Ron Harrison, Director of Technical Services for Orkin.

#### *Learning Objectives*

Downloadable resources include a bilingual educational flyer to distribute to residents, a White Paper on Bed Bugs and a copy of the PowerPoint presentation.

#### *Continuing Education*

NAAEI Designates will earn 1 CEC for taking this course.

ongoing monitoring. Of course, if there is an active infestation present, they will develop an appropriate control plan.

Working to keep multifamily facilities free from pests and the damage they can cause ultimately requires a partnership between property management, residents and the pest professional. **NA**

*Missy Henriksen is Vice President of Public Affairs for the National Pest Management Association. The NPMA, a non-profit organization with more than 7,000 members, was established in 1933 to support the pest management industry's commitment to the protection of public health, food and property. For information about pests and prevention tips, please visit [www.PestWorld.org](http://www.PestWorld.org).*

*The author thanks Robert M. Corrigan and his work in "Rodent Control: A Practice Guide for Pest Management Professionals" for his input to this article.*

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\*Data Source: American Water Works Association, WaterSense/EPA.

## Free Website Download Offers Affordable Housing IPM Guide

It's not often that pest management strategies are characterized as both effective and environmentally sensitive, but a new guide outlining integrated pest management (IPM) for affordable housing is seeking to change that perception.

"[Some] property managers across the country are paying for pest control, but don't feel like they are truly controlling pests," says Allison Taisey, Project Coordinator for the StopPests IPM Program based at the Northeastern IPM Center at Cornell University. "An IPM service both manages the pests and gives the peace of mind that future infestations are being prevented."

IPM is a method for reducing, preventing and eliminating infestations while promoting resident (and staff) health and well-being.

In 2007, Regional IPM Centers joined forces with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Healthy Homes Initiative and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to establish a program that would support affordable housing providers in their transition to IPM, with StopPests.org housing the program's resources. Since its formation, StopPests has trained 803 people in affordable housing and provided IPM kits for 1,600 residents.

StopPests.org offers a training curriculum endorsed by the National Pest Management Association and several federal agencies. The one-day training teaches:

- The specific roles for those supporting the least toxic and most effective measures for pest control in their communities;
- Pest management strategies that pose no risk or minimum risk of pesticide exposure to vulnerable, sensitive and disabled populations including infants and children, the elderly, pregnant women, and people with chemical sensitivities;
- The major health risks posed by common pests;
- Biology, behavior and least-toxic control measures for each of the pests covered in training; and
- Whom to contact and what to do if a problem with or related to pest control occur.

The training programs are free and offer facility evaluation, class instruction with completion certificates, resident support materials, and post-training consultation.

Visit [www.stoppests.org](http://www.stoppests.org) to download Integrated Pest Management: A Guide for Affordable Housing.

