

**RODENT CONTROL TASK FORCE
REPORT TO THE MAYOR**

*PREPARED BY THE
RODENT CONTROL TASK FORCE*

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Introduction

Rodent control is a key quality of life issue and a top concern in many neighborhoods. While the war on rats will never be completely won, an innovative pilot program initiated two years ago in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn has shown promising results. In August 2003 Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg directed Health Commissioner Thomas R. Frieden to begin to expand this successful program citywide starting with those areas where the problem has been shown to be particularly pervasive. In addition, the Mayor established a multi-agency Rodent Control Task Force, headed by Susan Kupferman, the Director of the Mayor's Office of Operations, to bring together 19 City agencies on a regular basis to provide the necessary support for this effort.

This program is designed to be proactive rather than simply reactive. Under this approach, the Task Force will concentrate its efforts on eliminating the conditions in which rats flourish. It utilizes best practices, employs multi-agency coordination, public outreach and education, and enforcement of City codes to change both physical conditions and resident behavior in order to prevent the recurrence of rodent problems. The program also emphasizes cooperative relationships. In order to succeed, government, businesses, and individual property owners must all share in the responsibility for addressing the rodent problem. The program's objectives are:

- To make City-managed properties and facilities a model for effective rodent control;
- To enforce, eradicate, rat-proof, and provide owner/resident education for all properties in the three current target areas;
- To enlist community involvement from elected officials, Community Boards and community-based organizations;
- To create and advance a legislative agenda to provide new tools against rodent infestations and reduce barriers to effective enforcement; and
- To track the program's success by measuring neighborhood-level performance related to the implementation of rodent prevention measures, and rodent activity.

Pursuant to the Mayor's direction, this report summarizes the Task Force initiative, outlines the early progress made during the Task Force's initial 60 days of operation, and documents the next steps to realizing the program's ambitious goals.

The Rodent Control Initiative --- Expanding the Bushwick Pilot

The Task Force's rodent abatement initiative builds on a federally funded pilot program that was initiated by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) in November 2001. The pilot targeted an area of 48 city blocks in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn that was known as one of the City's worst areas for rodents. The program represented the first application of an Integrated Pest Management strategy in New York City. It featured area-wide inspections to identify both signs of rodent activity and conditions – such as availability of refuse or other food sources, unclean or overgrown vacant lots, or holes permitting rodent access – that encourage infestation. Periodic reinspections were performed to monitor trends in properties passing or failing inspection standards. Notices of Violation were issued to property owners who continued without compliance; cleanup, exterminations, and rodent stoppage modifications to properties were performed and charged to property owners as necessary.

To ensure widespread adoption of effective rodent control techniques, clear protocols were developed for rodent-proofing and other steps to discourage infestation problems. These standards were disseminated through posters and brochures, and through training sessions for property owners conducted with the help of community-based organizations. Selected property owners were also provided with metal and plastic types of rodent-resistant trash receptacles. In addition, City agencies carried out assessment and abatement of rodent conditions on City-managed properties within the target area, including parks and playgrounds, vacant lots within public housing developments, public schools, and Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)-managed residential buildings. Within one year of the program's inception, the percent of inspected properties in the target area passing inspection standards rose markedly, from under a third, to over half.

Based on this success, the program's focus has now been expanded to cover more than 1,500 City blocks in three boroughs. The selection of target areas was based on the need to address neighborhoods with the worst rodent infestation problems. Criteria considered in making these selections included the location of rodent complaints by citizens; the location of reported rodent bite cases; the percentage of pest control inspections which showed signs of rodent activity; rodent violations issued by HPD inspectors in response to tenant complaints against private owners; and data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Housing Vacancy Survey for New York City, which is performed every three years and furnished to HPD. The Housing Vacancy Survey, which was last performed for Calendar 2002, tabulated the proportion of sample households by neighborhood that reported seeing mice or rats in their building in the last 90 days. Based on this information the following three areas are being targeted for early action (see Attachment A for maps):

- **Central Brooklyn** - parts of Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant. Bounded by Atlantic Avenue, Kent Avenue, Park Avenue, and Wyckoff Avenue. Includes parts of Brooklyn Community Boards #3 and 4.
- **South Bronx** – parts of Concourse Village, Concourse, Melrose and Highbridge. Bounded by East 168th Street, Brook Avenue, East 149th Street, and the Harlem River. Includes parts of Bronx Community Boards #1, 3 and 4.
- **Upper Manhattan** – East Harlem and part of Central Harlem. Bounded by East 96th Street, St. Nicholas Avenue, West 155th Street, and the Harlem River. Includes parts of Manhattan Community Boards #10 and 11.

Key 60-Day Accomplishments

The primary focus of the Task Force during its first 60 days of operation was on: (1) assessing and correcting rodent problems affecting public property within the identified neighborhoods, (2) preparing to launch a full-scale effort to assist private residents and community leaders with rodent control and prevention, including outreach, education and enforcement; and (3) reviewing legislative reforms to facilitate the implementation of rodent control and abatement throughout the City. Accomplishments in these areas are summarized below.

1. ***More than 2,900 public properties have been inventoried and assessed.*** The greatest accomplishment during the 60-day period has been the inventorying and assessment of publicly owned properties in the three targeted areas. The unprecedented scale of this effort culminated in the identification of more than 4,000 properties, including 63 public housing

developments and 123 parks and playgrounds. Three City agencies --- HPD, the Housing Authority and the Department of Parks and Recreation --- accounted for approximately 80 percent of the ownership. However, 26 different government agencies own property in the target areas. While residential use of public property is dominant, property types vary widely, including vacant land, commercial development, and government facilities such as playgrounds and schools.

During the first two months of implementing the initiative, 2,904, or over 70 percent of these properties were surveyed for rodent activity and related factors. Of the assessed sites, 956 or 33 percent exhibited signs of rodent infestation. The survey also recorded visible rodents at 253 sites, or nine percent of the sites assessed. While exterminations represent only one aspect of rodent control, of the sites where signs of infestation appeared, a relatively low proportion (24 percent) recorded a recent date of extermination.

2. ***Remediation plans are in place for public properties.*** There are several simple but critical measures that constitute an effective rodent-control program. In order to assist agencies in assessing the effectiveness of their programs, DOHMH developed an easy to use checklist which includes six areas of focus: (1) warning signs of active rodent infestations, (2) proper garbage storage conditions, (3) vacant lots or abandoned properties, (4) infrastructure and harborage, (5) building maintenance, and (6) extermination practices. Using this template, remediation plans have been formulated for each of the properties identified in the survey as having evidence of rodents. Highlights of these corrective actions plans for the larger public owners include:

- HPD will increase the frequency of exterminations from an as-needed basis to monthly for vacant buildings, and will continue work to fence all its vacant lots.
- The Department of Parks and Recreation is developing baiting schedules based on the level of infestation; at the worst sites, mesh litter baskets will be replaced with lidded metal cans, the frequency of refuse pickups will be increased, refuse storage practices will be reviewed and modified, weeds cut and masonry repaired.
- The Housing Authority is replacing door sweeps and missing garbage can lids, replacing mesh litter baskets with metal cans, exterminating/baiting, and cutting overgrown vegetation. The Authority has also scheduled weekly rather than monthly visits by pest control contractors to developments in the target areas. For smaller housing developments that use curbside areas for refuse pickups, the Authority is working with the Department of Sanitation to identify alternative refuse storage practices.
- The Metropolitan Transportation Authority has scheduled additional extermination services for facilities at which rodent activity was identified.
- The Department of Citywide Administrative Services has identified vacant parcels of land to be baited, following clearing of refuse by the Department of Sanitation.
- At sites identified with rodent problems, the Department of Education plans to implement procedures to avoid leaving refuse on sidewalks overnight, make necessary repairs to refuse storage containers, and increase the frequency of exterminations.

The Task Force will regularly track the timely implementation of ongoing remediation plans. Agencies have been required to report quarterly on the results of repeated site assessments for

all public property in the target areas to ensure that properties without any indication of rodent activity remain clean, and that progress continues to be made where infestation was evidenced. In addition, DOHMH is organizing seminars for participating agencies to ensure that rodent control best practices are part of agency remediation.

3. ***Initial outreach to affected City Council Members was completed.*** The Mayor directed the Task Force to develop a comprehensive education and community outreach plan, in cooperation with local elected officials, community boards, and community based organizations. As a first step in meeting this charge, representatives of the Task Force briefed City Council members whose constituencies lie within the targeted communities. These meetings established an ongoing dialogue with elected officials, and enlisted the necessary help and support for establishing further community involvement. Based on these meetings, Council members agreed to help identify community leaders and neighborhood-based organizations to participate in City-sponsored training sessions on rodent control best practices.

In addition, opportunities for public/private partnerships are being explored to provide resources to community groups to participate in rodent abatement activity. The Citizens Committee for New York City, a not-for-profit organization that encourages neighborhood volunteer action, is offering opportunities for block associations interested in rodent control and prevention to obtain small grants to cover project costs. The firm that produces d-Con rodent control products has also made a preliminary offer to provide free rodenticide for use in the initiative.

DOHMH is also developing a train-the-trainer seminar for a target audience of Community Boards, community based organizations, and church group leaders to increase public awareness and mobilize communities in addressing this problem.

4. ***Dissemination of public educational materials on rodent control has been expanded.*** Education is the foundation for partnering with communities and the public to share in the responsibility for rodent abatement. Before individuals can be held accountable, they need to know what to look for, and how to take appropriate action. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene is in the process of developing new educational materials and will be expanding the distribution of these materials by making it available to the key agencies that manage tenant properties in the targeted neighborhoods. The Department of Housing Preservation and Development will distribute thousands of brochures with its November rent billing, and the Housing Authority and the Department of Citywide Administrative Services will also distribute brochures to their tenants. Information will also be disseminated to each property owner as part of the DOHMH's rodent inspection process.

The Task Force is also exploring new avenues for developing and disseminating rodent related public service messages including partnering with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to formulate a special campaign focused on the subway system. The Department of Cultural Affairs is also investigating the possibility of obtaining pro bono assistance to design posters.

5. ***Rodent-resistant trash receptacles will be available in December.*** To ensure the success of the program, the Mayor committed additional resources to purchase over 8,000 new rodent-resistant trash receptacles. These trashcans will be used to help communities avoid recurring infestations by providing them with improved, rodent-resistant containers for residential refuse storage. The receptacles are made of thick, tough plastic, are wheeled, have attached,

self-closing lids, and are designed to be compatible with refuse disposal equipment. During its first 60 days the Task Force completed the necessary procurement requirements to enable an award of a contract for these containers. Based on the process, trash receptacles are expected to be available by year-end. Distribution will be based on need as determined by the results of rodent inspections.

6. ***The groundwork has been laid for private property inspections and enforcement.*** The key to successful rodent control and prevention in non-public buildings is on-site inspections. Inspections are used to identify problematic properties and to ensure that necessary corrective actions have been taken. Over the next 18 months DOHMH will inspect over 30,000 privately owned properties in the targeted communities, and will perform compliance re-inspections for properties identified as requiring remediation, followed by a final round of inspections for all private properties. In order to gear up for this level of enforcement activity, the Department is significantly increasing its staffing levels. A total of 25 new employees are in the process of being hired, including a project coordinator, 12 sanitarians, six exterminators, three supervisors and three program analysts. This represents a 50 percent increase in the number of inspectors and exterminators on staff. Utilizing civil service procedures, all positions are expected to be filled, and training completed by early next year.

In addition to inspections, during the first 60 days of the program the Department of Sanitation stepped up its enforcement of the Health Code. The tracking of Sanitation-issued violations in the targeted neighborhoods began in September. During the first five weeks of data collection there have been 2,545 cleanliness-related violations (for example illegal dumping, dirty sidewalks, or improper refuse receptacles). A total of 20 tickets were issued for illegal dumping. The Department also cleaned 176 vacant lots of debris.

7. ***Legislative proposals have been reviewed.*** The Office of City Legislative Affairs completed a review of the seven legislative proposals currently pending before the City Council that relate to rodent issues. Three deal with fines for rodent-related violations and with pest abatement requirements for certification and permitting. Another three proposals concern waste disposal practices and the frequency of corner basket collections. The final proposal would establish a pest control board.

Next Steps

Rodent prevention and control requires constant vigilance. Many of the elements initiated by the Task Force over the past 60 days such as the assessment and remediation of public properties, communication with elected officials, public education and seminars on best practices, and the expeditious cleanup of vacant lots and dump locations are ongoing activities that will be enhanced.

As noted previously, the Task Force's early effort was predominantly related to the clean up of public properties, with some significant work being completed to lay the groundwork for partnering with affected communities, and working with residents of the target areas to identify and address rodent related problems.

While the remediation and monitoring of public properties will be on-going through quarterly reports and periodic spot checks, over the course of the next 18 months the Task Force will substantially expand its focus to controlling and preventing rodent infestation on private

properties. In this regard there are a number of key milestones that have been identified for future action. The most significant includes the inspection of every private property in all three of the targeted areas. After a 60-day grace period during which building-owners will be educated about rodent control and offered the opportunity to avoid notices of violation, intensified inspections will begin. The inspection cycle will include three components: (1) initial inspection of all privately-owned buildings, with issuance of five-day Commissioner's orders to remedy conditions not in compliance with the Health Code; (2) compliance inspections of properties failing initial inspections, with issuance of Notices of Violation and scheduling of cleanup and abatement work to be charged to property owners; and (3) final inspection of all privately-owned buildings, to assess the impact of the program on target area conditions and identify the need for final cleanup and abatement work. Finally, as part of the inspection process, the rodent resistant trash receptacles will be distributed based on identified needs. The estimated timeframe for initiation and completion of these and other significant milestones are summarized below.

Key Milestones	Initiation	Completion
Enforcement Activity		
Initial Inspection	November 2003	November 2004
Compliance Inspection	February 2004	December 2004
Extermination & Cleanup	February 2004	January 2005
Re-inspection	December 2004	June 2005
Distribution of Trash Receptacles		
Needs Assessment	November 2003	December 2004
Distribution of Containers	January 2004	April 2005
Outreach and Education		
Community Board Meetings	October 2003	Ongoing
Meetings with Community-Based Organizations	November 2003	Ongoing
Develop Additional Educational Material	October 2003	December 2003
Distribute Educational Material	December 2003	June 2005
Best Practices Training for City Agencies	October 2003	December 2003