

# How to Control Rodents Humanely

## Advice for HOAs to Control Rodents Without Poisons

**The best method of rodent control is prevention.** Rodents move in when food, safety, and space are made available to them. HOA properties may experience increased numbers of rodents because they feature many people living in relatively close proximity to each other.

REMOVING what is attracting and sustaining the rodents is the only truly effective way to eliminate a rodent problem.

Aside from their risks to nontarget wildlife, along with domestic pets and even children, poisons only offer a temporary reprieve from nuisance rodents. Removing attractants is the only permanent solution to a rodent problem.

**Garbage:** Garbage mismanagement represents the most likely vector for an increased population of rodents on HOA property. Residents may be haphazard about closing garbage lids or even putting garbage into the correct containers. Any garbage left on the ground or otherwise accessible will attract rodents, and food availability will cause the rodents to remain and to breed.

**Step 1:** Make sure that all garbage bins have working and tight-fitting lids. Bins must not have holes or cracks or any other point of ingress.

**Step 2:** Thoroughly clean all garbage areas on the property. Spraying with high-pressure water is sufficient, but all food residues must be removed. This cleaning needs to be repeated any time food residue is found outside of the garbage bin. ANY food availability in the garbage areas will attract rodents.

**Step 3:** Improve lighting in the garbage areas and alert residents to new trash protocols. Do regular (nightly) inspections of all garbage areas to ensure compliance. Keep the garbage areas scrupulously clean and the rodents will soon move on.

**Bird Feeders:** If your complex allows bird feeders, the fallen seed will attract rodents. During times of increased rodent activity, requesting that residents temporarily remove their bird feeders and thoroughly clean up and remove all fallen seed from the area under the feeder is the most effective measure.

Otherwise, requesting or requiring residents to use a catchment container and to sweep up fallen seed nightly will significantly reduce the amount of food available to rodents and cause them to move on.

Similarly, pets should not be fed outdoors, and any pet food should be swept up and moved indoors at night.

**Reducing “Safe Passage” for Rodents:** Rodents are prey animals, and they prefer to remain hidden and under cover to avoid the eyes of both aerial and ground-based predators. Leafy ground covers like ivy provide safe passage for rodents, so removing ivy and other densely growing vegetation, especially near garbage areas will reduce the rodents’ sense of safety and encourage natural predators to help control them.

If rodents are entering homes, removing ivy and thick ground cover near buildings will reduce the ease of access the rodents have to their entry points.

**Exclude rodents from buildings.** Seal openings 1/4 inch or larger around the outside of all buildings with metal, concrete, or copper or steel wool.

Rodents follow accustomed paths, and close observation can often reveal where the animals are entering buildings. Look for dark smudged tracks along the base of buildings, and dark smudges from the oil on the rodents’ fur around holes they are using to enter buildings. A black light may also reveal urine tracks. Seal up any potential entry points with metal. Spray insulation foam also works temporarily, but rodents can eventually chew through it, so foam should only be used in conjunction with metal barriers.

Residents can also rodent-proof indoors. Look under the sink for gaps around the pipes, and seal those using 1/4” hardware cloth and a staple gun.

Preventing access into buildings significantly reduces the area’s attraction for rodents. Note that any rodents caught inside after exclusion work is completed may be trapped in a humane trap and released outdoors. With entry points sealed, the rodent will not reenter the building.

**Remove** potential rodent homes like yard debris, trash, construction waste, wood piles, compost etc. Remember that rodents like to feel safe and protected from view, so removing hiding places will make the property less attractive to them.

**Include natural rodent predators in your solution.** A family of five owls can consume thousands of rodents in breeding season. Placing a nest box to encourage a family of owls to make your property home can be a great alternative to commercial pest control methods. DO NOT erect an owl box if poisons are being used in your neighborhood. Learn more and purchase owl boxes from Sonoma County Wildlife's [Barn Owl Maintenance Program](#), of which WildCare's Hungry Owl Project is a member.

### **Lethal Alternatives**

If you exhaust all the above efforts and decide to employ lethal methods, please consider using snap traps, but only indoors. **Never use glue traps/boards.** They cause extreme suffering and are not humane.

Be careful about where you place lethal snap traps. These traps should only be used indoors out of reach of children or pets. If you find it necessary to use snap traps outdoors, to reduce the risks to nontarget animals including federally protected birds, traps should always be placed in locked tamper resistant boxes.

### **Deterring Rodents from Cars**

Rodents may eat the wiring in cars due to car manufacturers' use of plant-based insulating material that smells appealing to them, or simply out of a desire to chew.

Although installing metal mesh around wiring harnesses and rubber hoses and across any openings where rodents could crawl into the ventilation or intake systems is a permanent solution to the problem, simple deterrents and adjustments can also be effective.

Note that the goal is to make vehicles less accessible and attractive to rodents than other food sources. All the suggestions below will do that.

### **To Reduce or Prevent Rodent Incursion into Vehicles:**

**Step 1: Do not park near bushes/ivy/plantings.** Rodents prefer not to cross open spaces where predators may see them, so parking away from plantings

makes a vehicle a less tempting target. Note that removing ivy and thick ground cover on the property will help reduce rodent presence overall.

**Step 2: Do not leave food items or used food containers in your vehicle.** The scent of food will attract rodents which can access the cab of the vehicle through the engine compartment.

**Step 3: Apply sprayed scent deterrents and reapply them regularly.** Rodents may be attracted to a vehicle's wiring because it smells or tastes good. Peppermint spray and cayenne pepper spray can both be successful deterrents. Spraying a combination of the two on the vehicle's wiring will deter chewing, and spraying it on the tires and in the wheel-wells will deter rodents from climbing into the engine compartment.

- Sources who have tried this successfully say that the smell does not filter into the vehicle compartment
- Initially, spray on tires must be applied every time the car is parked. Engine compartment spray should be renewed every few days.

**Step 4: Place static scent deterrents in the engine compartment and near wires.** Unused dryer sheets can be effective, as are mothballs. Replace when the scent begins to fade.

**Step 5: Use ultrasonic deterrents.** The efficacy of ultrasonic deterrents is questionable, but anecdotal evidence suggests they help. The goal is to make your vehicle less attractive than other potential food sources, and noise and light will do that. Buy battery-powered devices, or you can purchase ones that hook directly to your vehicle's battery.