

Rodent Control Program Assessment: San Francisco Department of Public Health

July 2015

Introduction

In the early 1900s, San Francisco's Chinatown was the center of the first bubonic plague epidemic in the continental United States. Authorities worked to build a case to prove there was a major public health problem, and funds were provided to develop a comprehensive rodent control program for the city. By 1908, after two million rats had been killed and 190 people had died in two outbreaks, the plague was finally eradicated from San Francisco.

Currently, San Francisco has no comprehensive vector control program. Rodent control is conducted by food inspectors in their assigned district and by Code Enforcement Technicians within the Healthy Housing Program and Vector Control Program, in the Environmental Health Branch, San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH). Overall, the Healthy Housing Program and Vector Control Program has three rodent control components: (1) addressing rodent issues identified during routine Healthy Housing Program inspections; (2) addressing rodent issues identified in response to complaints; and (3) routinely baiting city manholes for sewer rats.

Because SFDPH does not have a comprehensive vector control program, all vector issues are addressed as complaints under the public health nuisance ordinance. SFDPH, which has conducted rodent control activities and surveillance in different capacities since the early 1900s, was well staffed until 1990, when funding significantly decreased. Currently, the Healthy Housing Program consists of 11 staff, who inspect over 16,000 multi-unit apartments and incorporate rodent control into their duties. No staff are dedicated solely to conducting rodent control activities. Rodent control activities are funded through the general fund, and funding has remained the same for the past five years. The Vector Control and Health Housing Inspection Program Fee, charged to multi-unit apartments and hotel owners, covers the cost of regularly occurring inspections, initial complaint-based inspections, and the first reinspection.

Rodent Control Activities

As part of the program's rodent control activities, the program follows integrated pest management (IPM) principles to monitor and respond to rodent activities efficiently and safely. SFDPH employs the service of PESTEC, an IPM company, to bait manholes in San Francisco. PESTEC uses traps and rodenticides in its rodent control activities. PESTEC rodent control is primarily complaint-driven, with a comprehensive manhole treatment program with a budget of \$200,000 per



Photo: <http://www.freeimages.com/photo/1433858>

year, half of which is exclusively for Chinatown. In 2014, the program responded to approximately 23 complaints per month depending on the season. The complaints were recorded into a database upon receipt. The most common rodent related issues reported included infestation of housing and food facilities.

In San Francisco, the most common rodents are roof rats, Norway rats, and house mice. The program does not track rodent-borne diseases and rodent-related bites/injuries but relies on experts in the Bureau of Disease Control to notify the program. The program had no rodent-borne diseases and no bites/injuries in the past year.

Public Education and Partnerships

SFDPH staff engage with the local community on rodent control through meetings with residents and special interest groups; for example, staff conduct educational meetings with the San Francisco Professional Gardeners Association. In the past, the program provided comprehensive all-day training on vector and rodent control for service providers, hotel managers and owners, apartment managers and owners, and other interested groups. While no rodent-specific communication plan exists, SFDPH disseminates rodent-related information through pamphlets, the SFDPH website, and online resources. Rodent control program data and health information can be publicly accessed through the database with a query request. SFDPH also works with

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local city departments and agencies, such as the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department, San Francisco Department of the Environment, and San Francisco Department of Building Inspection.

Policies and Regulations

The publication *Director's Rules and Regulations for Prevention and Control of Rodents and other Vectors, and to Promote Housing Habitability* provides guidance to all relative stakeholders regarding best practices for vector control and prevention. All laws and regulations related to rodent control are reviewed as needed. The program supports public and private pest management programs and enforces vector control laws when needed. The program makes an effort to educate and inform the public about any changes in laws or regulations, specifically during routine inspections and when responding to complaints or upon request. The program also assesses the ability of relevant community members to comply with the laws and regulations.

Rodent Control Program Workforce

Processes exist to ensure employees have proper certifications; for example, employees are California Department of Public Health Certified Vector Control Technicians and attend ongoing education and training courses. Currently, there is no in-house program to train rodent control staff. Technicians must self-study for vector control certifications and attend seminars when available. With adequate funding and staffing, the program would look to establish a training program for staff that included lectures, field work, and lab work.

Conclusion

The most significant challenges for the Healthy Housing Program and Vector Control Program are lack of funding for rodent control, lack of adequate staffing to conduct IPM inspections, lack of regulations that address construction sites, and pre-baiting issues to prevent rodent migration into communities. Despite the challenges, the Healthy Housing Program and Vector Control Program has been successful in identifying rodent infestation during routine inspections, responding to complaints promptly, using a private pest control company to bait sewers, and targeting communities with the greatest rodent populations.

In the future, SFDPH hopes to gain funding and support to establish a comprehensive vector control program, with concentration on rodents and mosquitos.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Johnson Ojo, PhD, REHS

Principal Environmental Health Inspectors/Special Programs Manager
San Francisco Department of Public-Environmental Health Branch
E-mail: johnson.ojo@sfdph.org
Website: <http://www.sfdph.org/dph/eh>

Lisa Brown, MPH

Senior Program Analyst
Environmental Health, Pandemic Preparedness,
and Catastrophic Response
National Association of County and City Health Officials
E-mail: lbrown@naccho.org

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1100 17th St, NW, 7th Floor Washington, DC 20036

P 202-783-5550 F 202-783-1583

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