

RODENT CONTROL

By Jennifer Plombon, SRA Board Member

Some residents of Semiahmoo have expressed concerns about rodent poisoning. One resident has twice found dead mice in his courtyard with no visible signs of injury, and another resident has had a cat that showed symptoms of poisoning. Residents are also concerned about the effects of these poisons on animals other than pets, such as the wildlife here that needs to survive because they eat the rodents we want to be rid of; birds of prey, coyotes, raccoons, bobcats, crows, etc. As part of our mission to protect and enhance the environment and wildlife of Semiahmoo, what would the SRA recommend to control rodents and prevent collateral damage? What are the best ways to control rodents?

First: do the rodents of concern *need* to be controlled? If they are simply outside, living their outside lives, eating insects and weed seeds, and NOT coming indoors, why do they need to be killed? Their mere presence causes no harm to humans (Hanta virus not being a problem in Western Washington, and Deer Mice, which carry the ticks that cause Lyme disease, aren't residents here), so why not let them be?

If they are indeed coming inside buildings, they need to be controlled. Don't try home-made devices; they don't work well and are often very inhumane. The best plan is to call a licensed, reputable pest control company. The FIRST thing they should do, before laying out any poison or setting any traps, is to find the entrance/exit holes. This isn't easy; rats need a hole the size of a quarter to enter, and mice an even smaller hole. But without *stopping* the entrance of rodents, it will take an infinite amount of traps and poison to control them. Indoor control includes electrocution traps; snap traps (the ones with the spring-loaded bar that snap the rodent's neck); glue traps; and poison.

The most humane method is electrocution traps; properly baited and placed, they pose very little risk to other animals in the vicinity and kill the rodent instantly with a high dose of electricity. Newer models don't need an outlet, they can run on batteries. They can also be placed outdoors, but innocent animals such as moles, voles, chipmunks, 'possums, etc. are at risk.

The next most humane method (ONLY recommended for use INDOORS as they can harm other curious wildlife if placed outside) is snap traps; they *should* kill the rodent instantly (although not always, sadly) and properly baited and placed, they pose very little risk to other animals or people in the vicinity.

Glue traps are cruel and unnecessary given the other, better methods. The animals will tear off their own skin trying to escape the glue, and since trying to pull them loose from the trap is almost impossible, the usual method is to simply throw the trap, struggling animal and all, into the garbage. This is simply inhumane and they should not be used.

Poison is the worst choice; it is inhumane and indiscriminate. Most rodent poisons are oral anti-coagulants, which disrupt the normal clotting process and cause internal, uncontrollable bleeding. The animal takes a long time to die, and whilst doing so, staggers around, appearing weak and vulnerable and attracting the attention of predators which ingest the poison when they eat the stricken rodent, causing their own death by bleeding out. Pets may be saved from rodent poison with very prompt veterinary care, but wildlife has to hope they're found and taken to a wildlife rehab center, where survival rates from rodenticide poisoning are usually low.

All rodent control comes with a price; not only are the rodents killed, but other animals, birds and humans are at risk of harm from the methods used. Please do all you can to minimize the use of controls and to choose the most humane.