



RODENTS IN FOOD AND BEVERAGE PROCESSORS



A successful, profitable food and beverage processor that consumers can trust depends on a safe and sanitary facility. Rodent infestation is an often-debilitating issue for manufacturers that must be addressed immediately. However, prevention is the best medicine, and by the time you have a rodent problem, it's often too late to recover your operations.

When a group of pests enter your dining and beverage establishment and decide to stick around, it can tarnish your reputation by creating bad publicity, which can then lead to profit losses. It can also wreak havoc on employee morale and ruin the workplace atmosphere indefinitely.

With the right measures and protocols, however, manufacturers can ensure their facilities are free of pests. This white paper will address the issue of rodents in food and beverage processors and how the problem can be prevented in the first place.

How rodents typically enter food and beverage processors

Rodents are small, stealthy creatures that often go unnoticed. They enter processors through structural openings such as loose door seals, missing mortar, construction joints and unsealed entry points. Rodents need very minimal space to gain access to a facility – mice can squeeze through an opening the size of a dime, and rats, one the size of a quarter.

The most common scenario occurs when rodents enter the facility via doors left ajar by employees. Rodents can also be brought into a building along with infested incoming goods. For example, mice may enter a facility via a shipment of raw ingredients delivered from the fields, such as potatoes. Employees can also bring infested outside storage items and equipment such as pallets into the plant.

Once they gain access, rodent populations can quickly multiply. Mice can live and procreate within just a single pallet of food goods with very little visibility. In the scenarios above, rodents have food and shelter, and do not require an external water source as they can effectively metabolize moisture from their food. In summary, the characteristics of food and beverage processors form a potential breeding ground for rodent populations.

Signs of rodents

There are many signs that rodents have entered a food and beverage processor, including:

- **Physical sightings:** Staff may see rodents scurry across the floor or behind shelves. Remember to keep eyes on the floor when turning on the lights at the beginning of the workday.
- **Rodent droppings:** Small, blackish-brown droppings and urine marks can litter the floor, shelving and pallets.
- **Damaged goods:** Rodents may chew into food sources and leave gnaw marks on shelving and equipment. Some pests may also create holes in the walls and floorboards as a passageway.
- **Shredded soft items:** Rodents may shred easy-to-tear items such as packaging and insulation and use the shredded pieces to build nests.

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- **Grey rub marks:** These will be found on the sides of openings where mice travel frequently. Oils and dirt from their fur rub off on the outer surface of an opening.
- **Distinctive smell:** A very noticeable smell of urine and feces may be present in the case of larger infestations. Stale smells from closed-off spaces could also signify an infestation.

What factors keep rodents around?

A good prevention strategy is to keep a food and beverage facility as uninviting and inhospitable to rodents as possible. This involves knowing the characteristics of an environment that are favorable to rodents. These include:

- **Lack of quick, aggressive action:** Many people don't realize how fast rodents breed and how fast a rodent population can grow. It is imperative to act quickly at the first sign of a rodent entry.
- **Outstanding structural flaws:** Rodents are always looking for openings into a facility. Neglecting to repair broken doors, air drafts, wall holes and other weak spots in a processing plant is much like inviting rodents into the space.
- **Food spills outside:** Rodents are attracted to exposed food outside, for example, spills around garbage containers and silos with exposed grain at the base.
- **Poor sanitation conditions:** Exposed food can offer rodents ample feeding sources. Food and food ingredients should be contained whenever possible and spills removed daily.
- **No pest pressure:** When there are no other rodents around to take over the shelter or claim the food and garbage, pests are more likely to stick around and call the facility their new habitat with no desire to leave.

When considering rodent infestations, it is important to remember that they move in a three-dimensional world. Keep in mind their traveling and eating habits are not those of human beings.

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Health risks of rodents in food and beverage processors

Rodents present very serious health risks for food and beverage manufacturers, employees and consumers.

Rodents frequently spread diseases through feces, urine, saliva and bites. These diseases can include Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome, Rat Bite Fever, Salmonellosis and Toxoplasmosis, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. While feces may be visible, mouse urine is often invisible to the naked eye. Mice urinate indiscriminately as they travel, and, unfortunately, often over exposed food product. Urine can best be detected using a blacklight to fluoresce the urine, but this approach is often impractical as a very dark environment is needed for this method to work well.

Be ready to take action

A rodent infestation can be devastating to a food and beverage processor. Beyond assessing the ways pests can enter and what keeps them around, it's important to remember that the biggest risk facilities face is underestimating the initial issue. The population size can grow rapidly if left unchecked. If you think you're only dealing with a few mice, you're likely dealing with a dozen. Pay close attention to the well-being of your business to address problems quickly before they turn into larger issues and cost your facility its reputation.

Rodents present many serious health and business risks to manufacturers, their employees and consumers of their products, and as such prevention is the best medicine.

Abell Pest Control is one North America's leading professional pest management companies. White Papers are supplied by Abell's national Quality Assurance team.

Sources:

- Client interview and notes
- <https://www.cdc.gov/rodents/diseases/direct.html>

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