



**City of Phoenix**  
**WATER SERVICES DEPARTMENT**

**Q&A**  
**RATS**

1 of 2 6/2015

**BACKGROUND:** Roof Rats (*Rattus rattus*), sometimes called black rats, are aerial, very agile climbers and usually live and nest above ground in shrubs, trees, and dense vegetation such as ivy. They travel from trees to roofs or from accesses near overhead utility lines, which they use to travel from area to area. In buildings, they are most often found in enclosed or elevated spaces in attics, walls, false ceilings, and cabinets. They have been found in swimming pools, laundry rooms, attics, garages and patios, as well as on power lines. Roof Rats spend 90 percent of their life four feet or more off the ground. Although very rare, roof rats can enter a home's plumbing system, most likely from the vent stack that protrudes from your roof.

**1. How do roof rats get into a house?**

Roof rats frequently enter homes and garden sheds through any opening larger than a nickel. They follow pipes down from the attic, sneak through doggie doors, gnaw through drywall and enter kitchens, bathrooms or base sink cabinets. They chew through wood, plastic, aluminum siding, and dry wall. These rodents are fond of attics because they provide a safe refuge and a nesting place for their young. Roof rats have been known to enter the sewer system through the roof vent pipes.

**2. What are common signs of roof rat activity?**

Hollowed citrus and other fruit, noises in the attic and walls (especially at night), gnawing sounds and gnaw marks around roof eaves, damage to plastics and covering on electrical wires.

**3. What can I do to keep roof rats out of my house?**

Contact an exterminator for assistance. Keep fruit from trees away from your roof, remembering that rats can jump from trees to your roof. Use stucco diamonds mesh to screen and seal all holes and vents leading to your home. Look for holes in exterior walls and near hot water heaters, washers and dryers (dryer vent pipes) and sewer stacks on the roof. Caulk all cracks. When rodent-proofing against roof rats, pay close attention to the roof and roof line areas to assure all accesses are closed. Plug or seal all openings of greater than 1/2 inch (1.3 cm) diameter with concrete mortar, steel wool, or metal flashing. Rodent-proofing against roof rats usually requires more time to find entry points because of their greater climbing ability. Eliminate vines growing on buildings and, when feasible, overhanging tree limbs that may be used as travel routes. The elimination of food and water through good sanitation practices can do much to reduce rodent infestation. Store pet food in sealed containers and do not leave it out at night. Use proper garbage and refuse disposal containers and implement exterior

sanitation programs. Remove fruits or nuts that drop in backyards. Strip and destroy all unwanted fruit when the harvest period is over.

#### **4. What do they eat and drink?**

Roof rats love to eat citrus fruit (because it serves as both a food and water source), nuts and seeds. As with most rodents, they will also eat pet food, stored grains and discarded food.

#### **5. Do roof rats carry diseases?**

Roof rats throughout Maricopa County continue to test negative for tularemia (rabbit fever), hantavirus and plague.

#### **6. What's being done about roof rats in the sewers?**

Roof rats have been found in sewer systems, but this is not common as they avoid water and usually can not return to their nest. However, the Water Services Department has an aggressive program to trap and remove roof rats that occasionally find their way into the sewer. We quickly set traps in the sewers. The traps are baited and monitored and remain as long as rats are being captured.

#### **7. Who should I notify about a roof rat issue?**

Call the Maricopa County Environmental Compliant line at (602) 506-6616 or log your complaint at [www.maricopa.gov/envsvc](http://www.maricopa.gov/envsvc). Vector Control officers identify and test rat specimens.