

The Rats Next Door Are Dangerous. What Can I Do About It?

Various city agencies respond to rodent complaints, depending on where the pests are and who owns the building. But be prepared to wait.



Q: There is a co-op near where I live on the Upper West Side that has shrubbery with rat holes — and rats coming out of them — abutting the building. I contacted the building’s management company, and they responded, but they don’t seem to do anything about it. If the owners or management company is alerted to these issues, and does not fix them, what can be done? I’m sure the city has something to say, but can a citizen bring a civil suit against the building? What if somebody gets bit by one of the rats?

A: First, alert the city by calling 311 or filling out a [complaint form online](#). Many city agencies respond to rodent complaints, depending on where the pests are holing up and who owns the building.

Then, get in line. As of early August, there were more than 25,100 rodent complaints, including for rats and mice, filed this year — on pace to exceed the roughly 31,600 complaints in 2019, before the pandemic,

according to city data. You can also check the inspection status of a property on the city’s [“Rat Information Portal.”](#)

If the problem isn’t fixed, the department of health can issue a summons, and may also order an exterminator at the expense of the property owner, an agency spokesman said.

Litigation should be the last option, because the process can be costly and time-consuming, with no guarantee of a positive outcome, said Steven D. Sladkus, a partner at Schwartz Sladkus Reich Greenberg Atlas. But if the problem persists and management is unresponsive, a resident in the co-op could sue for breach of their proprietary lease, a contract that outlines the corporation’s obligations to maintain the building and keep the premises safe — including from murine invaders.

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