



CASE STUDY

A STEAMY SITUATION WITH RODENTS

RATS IN A COMMERCIAL KITCHEN IS A WHOLE DIFFERENT LEVEL OF PROBLEM

A fly in the soup is bad enough but a rat in a commercial kitchen is a whole different level of problem. Not only is the food being prepared at risk but so are the people who eat it, serve it and cook it.

The Sprague QA and technical team was called to tackle one such sticky issue in an office building that was part of a larger industrial complex. Here is the story:

A Sprague service specialist had been battling a rodent issue in the facility for nearly a month with no luck identifying the source of the rodent's access to the five-story building's ground floor cafeteria where it had been spotted by the kitchen staff.

The Sprague team responded immediately and conducted a comprehensive inspection of the area above the employee cafeteria and kitchen that served hundreds of diners each day. They found abundant evidence of rodents in the form of droppings on the false ceiling tiles and pipes that ran above the area. The droppings indicated the invader was a roof rat.

There were additional sightings and the situation was quickly escalating with the company's c-suite pressing for Sprague to identify where the rat was gaining access to the building and to eliminate the threat.

Adding more pressure was the fact the union representing the kitchen staff was in the middle of new contract negotiations with the company, and the rat issue was become an unwelcome part of the conversation. The union was claiming unsafe work conditions and threatening to have workers walk off the job which would have created an operational and PR disaster.

There were weekly calls and daily updates on the status of Sprague's efforts to stop the rat from shutting down an entire office building.

Since roof rats, unlike their Norway rat cousins, can spend their entire lives above ground accessing the cafeteria and kitchen through an entry or loading dock door that was left open or from a crawlspace below was unlikely.

Sprague set multiple snap traps to catch the rat but also needed to identify how it was gaining access. It was proposed to install motion sensitive cameras in the area to track the rat's movements, but the union objected citing worker privacy issues.

A deal was finally reached that allowed cameras to be installed under counters in the kitchen and service areas where no employee faces could be shown. The cameras synced to a cell phone and would send an email with an image of whatever was setting off the motion sensor.

On the second day after the cameras were installed the Sprague QA and technical team received a photo of the rat coming down a support column with a decorative façade over it that ran directly into a steam table in the cafeteria.

The rat was accessing the column from the ceiling between the first and second floor where Sprague had found the droppings. It was moving up and down freely in the wall void around the column and was feeding on built up food waste that was present in the steam table, kitchen and kitchen floors.

With the rat's entry point identified (and later sealed off), Sprague installed a gauntlet of snap traps in the ceiling and zip tied to the conduit above where the column went into the ceiling and the rat was caught the next day. To make sure the rat was a solo bad actor, Sprague left the cameras and traps in place for the next few weeks, but no other unwelcome visitors were spotted or caught.

LESSON LEARNED

Seeing is believing. By using motion sensing cameras Sprague was able to place a "service specialist" in the facility 24/7 in an area that can be hard to access (i.e. drop ceilings) and gather data. The photo allowed Sprague to pinpoint its control efforts, and the result was a quick capture.

THE ROOF RAT FILE

Since roof rats can spend their entire life above ground you will find evidence of their presence in areas of a structure you and your employees rarely, if ever, would go. Often these areas are hard if not impossible to access and can include:

- Exposed beams and pipes
- Hidden pipe chases and utility lines
- Wall voids and drop ceilings
- Concrete cinder blocks
- On top of shelving units
- Overhead electrical junction boxes
- On top of or inside equipment (they have been found inside large ovens in commercial bakeries)
- Raised and false floors