

11-1947

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November
1947

Nebraska
COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK
IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
U. of N. Agr. College & U. S. Dept. of Agr. Cooperating
W. F. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

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1503-47

SUGGESTIONS FOR RAT CONTROL PROGRAMS FOR CITIES AND TOWNS

Clarence A. Socter, Extension Entomologist

In the establishment of rat control programs for urban areas several factors should be considered. Before beginning such work an evaluation of the program should be made. Will the program be justified in light of costs and all factors concerned over a period of time---or will it end with a short campaign which will mean that the rats will be permitted to repopulate any areas cleaned out and consequently little be accomplished in actual control of the situation.

If the program is justified, citizens cooperation should be surveyed and determined. Success of the program depends upon the interest and cooperation of a large majority of the population. Next in importance is a survey of the rat breeding and harboring sites within and adjacent to the control area. This step is necessary before proper organization of the program can be made. Organization of the program and delegation of the various phases is the next step. Civic and social organizations would probably assume these responsibilities. The actual carrying out of the control work completes the program.

I. Evaluation of the Program.

This phase is a responsible part of the program. Medical doctors and city and county health officials might be surveyed. Civic organizations could be questioned. City and county officials may accept responsibility on the basis of past experiences.

II. Civic Interest and Cooperation.

Citizen approval and participation are essential. Private premises must be treated either by the individuals or with his approval. Newspaper or house to house surveys will determine interest and probable cooperation. The program may fail if this phase is overlooked.

III. Survey of Situation.

1. Business buildings and private homes and other buildings should be surveyed to determine whether or not they are rat proof and if not what is needed to make them rat proof. (This is to include grain elevators.)

2. Private garbage disposal facilities should be surveyed to determine number and conditions.

3. City dumps should be inspected to determine size and condition.

4. Sewer openings should be located and plotted on a city map.

5. Refuse and junk piles, and embankments, etc., that might harbor rats should be surveyed for size, extent, and located on maps.

6. Chicken houses, stables, outdoor toilets, feed lots, cattle holding yards and barns should be surveyed to determine size and number.

7. Densest rat population areas should be plotted on maps. (i.e. what business block or general area)

All of these surveys must be conducted to determine areas to be treated and amount of labor and materials needed. These surveys will probably result in a good index of what will be necessary to keep the program going on a year around and actual control basis.

IV. Organization of the Program.

The setting of the various phases of the program and the apportioning of the work is essential to efficiency. Many civic service and social clubs have cooperated in similar programs in the past. A few of these are the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, F.F.A., Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, Chambers of Commerce, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and church clubs.

V. Control Recommendations.

1. Fortified Red Squill and ANTU are the chemicals recommended for rat poisoning control programs. Use in bait mixtures, water and dusting with ANTU, and in baits for the red squill are the common ways of use.

2. Poisons and trapping are not a substitute for sanitation and ratproofing. Before and after the killing program is begun proper ratproofing and doing away with available food sources of rats should be carried out. All granaries, elevators, barns, poultry houses, restaurants, etc. should be ratproofed as far as is economically practical. Garbage retention and disposal should be carried out. Refuse, trash, manure piles, etc., under which rats may harbor should be cleaned up.

3. Private home owners should be encouraged to obtain covered garbage containers and clean up their garbage areas. They should also check their homes and other buildings to make sure that they are rat proof or offering as few rat harborages as possible. Openings in basements should be screened or blocked off. Doors on barns and granaries and poultry feeders and other feed storage places should be fixed to keep out rats.

4. Then comes the actual killing campaign.

a. In most cases a plan is followed for coordinating eradication campaigns in neighboring blocks so that sizeable tracts are covered in a single operation. This is largely a measure for convenience and efficiency, for there is no indication at present that isolated blocks recover or are reinvaded any more rapidly after treatment than grouped blocks. An entire city block should be the smallest area treated.

The usual procedure is to find some one who will assume responsibility for organizing a block team and determining amounts of bait needed and securing the bait from central bait station if one is operated.

Not all blocks are handled by volunteers. It may be necessary for a city crew to perform the work in cases of special urgency and in blocks where a local lack of public interest has resulted in the leaving of heavy infestations in otherwise clean sections of the city.

b. Eradication campaigns. The first activity of a block rat control team is the staging of an intensive eradication campaign through all buildings, yards and lots in the block. This is done in a single operation. The steps of this are:

1. Notification of block residents, by means of placards which are posted conspicuously and by notice cards which are distributed to all houses. The notices inform the residents of the intentions of the volunteer team and the mutual benefits which can be had through cooperation. They ask residents to clean up all exposed garbage, to leave their gates and outbuildings unlocked at a designated time and to confine their pets. At the same time they warn of the potential danger of the poison to unconfined pets and irresponsible children (especially when ANTU is used).

Requests to withhold poison from specified places are, of course, honored. Direct verbal or written permission are sought whenever possible or where there may be danger of damage suits if any pets happen to be killed, and there is no city ordinance making it necessary to control rats.

2. Distribution of poison bait--Poison bait, generally ANTU at 3 per cent is finely ground, is distributed one or two days after notification or as weather conditions permit. Each registered worker takes a bucket of prepared bait, as supplied to a local headquarters by the city crew, and proceeds through the block from the alley, placing small spoon-sized piles in exposed and protected sites around all real or potential harborage, food sources, runways, and trails in yards and buildings. From 10 to 50 piles may be placed in an infested property, and from 10 to 40 pounds of bait is commonly used in an average sized block. Thoroughness is emphasized as fundamental to success; and places which cannot be entered are listed for further inspection and attention.

3. Check up of results---When ANTU baits are used rats will die usually within the next two days. Counts of dead rats are made these two days and all signs such as rat holes and fresh droppings obliterated on the second and third day. Residents are asked to sweep up and discard all dead rats and all uneaten bait. A report on the operation is then prepared by the block captain and submitted to the office or officials directing the program.

4. Follow-up---Eradication campaigns should be followed up immediately with special measures at all sites of persisting infestation. City crews or volunteer crews assist in this work with burrow fumigation and traps.

5. Repeat campaigns---Complete eradication is rarely achieved in a campaign. Thus, repeat treatments are usually indicated once a year and sometimes more often.

The best policy may be to use ANTU corn in overall block campaigns once a year and other measures, such as burrow fumigation, trapping and poisons with alternate poisons and baits, in between times treatments are needed, being sure not to overlook the most important general cleanup and ratproofing programs.

6. Continuous emphasis of ratproofing, sanitation and keeping food from the rats on a year round basis should be the important item on the program. In this respect a special rat control division of one of the city departments might be set up in larger cities with special trained men to carry on year around program. In smaller communities one man of the street repair and maintenance departments or similar departments might be trained and delegated to carry on the year around program.

7. Last but not least one should remember that in handling and putting out rat poisons all due precautions should be taken as regards the life and well being of people, domestic animals, and wildlife that do not come under the pest control program.