

Watertown City Council
Committee on Human Services
Councilor Palomba-Chair, Councilor Bays-Vice Chair, Councilor Gannon-Secretary
Committee Report – Meeting on May 11, 2023

The Committee on Human Services held a public meeting on May 11, 2023 at 6:30 PM in the City Council Chambers to continue the discussion of the establishment of a City-wide Rodent Control Plan. This was a hybrid meeting so residents could join on zoom. Also, questions and comments could be sent to Councilor Gannon at jgannon@watertown-ma.gov. Finally, the meeting was recorded by WCATV and will be broadcasted at a future date.

Present at the meeting were Councilor Tony Palomba, Chair; Councilor Caroline Bays, Vice Chair; and Councilor John Gannon, Secretary. Also attending from the Administration was Larry Ramdin, Director of the Health Department and on zoom, Tom Watkins, Director of Administration and Finance for the Department of Public Works. Residents in attendance were Karen Russo in the Chambers and Dean Martino, Roma Jerome, Tanya Mandel, Gabe Camacho, and Jacky vanLeeuwen on zoom.

Councilor Palomba began the meeting by saying that the main topic will be a presentation of the latest draft of the rodent control plan being developed by Mr. Larry Ramdin. However before hearing from Mr. Ramdin, the Chair asked Mr. Watkins to update us on the results the new SMART Technology traps that electrocute the rodent. Below is a summary of his remarks and answers to questions from Councilor Bays, Councilor Gannon, and residents.

- 1) It has been two months since the 80 traps were distributed – 40 on Arsenal Street, 30 on Mt. Auburn Street, and 10 distributed at various high probability locations – and the Department has received regular data via a heat map and an excel spreadsheet from the vendor. One of the pieces of information that Mr. Watkins was asked to look into is whether the time a rodent is electrocuted is recorded.
- 2) There have been 63 catches. There were 33 catches at 770 Mt. Auburn Street near Sacred Heart Church that were attributed to the road construction in the area. There were 10 catches at 275 Arsenal Street near the Watertown Mall. There were 5 catches at Stanley Street near the Recycling Center. The remaining 15 catches were found in the various boxes distributed on Mt. Auburn and Arsenal Streets as well as in some of the boxes that were placed in areas where the Department anticipated particular high activity such as near public dumpsters.
- 3) It is not possible at this time to develop a definitive strategic plan as to where to put traps in the future given there is only 2 months of data. The Department anticipates it will be able to do this at the end of the 5 month pilot program. Also, the Department recognizes that 80 boxes are not enough to address the existing problem, but will determine how many might be needed at the conclusion of the pilot.
- 4) The cost of the pilot program is \$60,000 for the 80 boxes which includes providing data, maintaining the boxes, and removing dead rodents. The size of the pilot program was determined by the amount of funds available. It was unclear at this time whether there will be resources available to extend the use of the SMART Technology boxes.

Moving on, the Chair asked Mr. Ramdin to present the latest draft of his rodent control plan. Mr. Ramdin prepared copies of the plan for the Committee members and those in the Chamber. He did not have a power point presentation. He said he would look into getting the plan on the

Department's webpage. Also there would be copies available in the Health Department's office. Mr. Ramdin said that he was presenting not **a plan but a report** of the status of the problem in Watertown, what individual departments are presently doing to address the problem, and action steps they are considering. The title of his presentation is "**Rodent Control and Management Activities**" and it is attached to these minutes.

Mr. Ramdin reminded the Committee that 100% elimination of rats is not possible. The goal is to reduce the rat population and that this must be a joint effort of the City and the residents. Residents should take steps to eliminate the sources of food, water, and shelter that rats rely on.

Mr. Ramdin noted that the City Manager has included an additional staff person in the Health Department whose major responsibility would be rodent control and has allocated additional money in the Department's rodent control line item. He explained that the *internal rodent control working group*, comprised of the Health, Community Development and Planning, Building, Zoning, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, and Public Buildings departments, is focusing on identifying gaps and duplications in rodent control efforts, utilizing public/private activities to educate about prevention, treatment, and regulatory responses, and working to "*develop a community wide rodent control plan/guidance*". He noted that this effort can't be done overnight and will take time. He then went on to review the activities of each department including key issues, current status of activities, and action items. He spent significant time explaining how the Health Department investigates complaints and about the historical data on rodent complaints from 2020 to the present, with an emphasis on the last 6 months. He also spoke about the Department's community outreach efforts including information on their webpage about how residents can reduce rodent activity and a specific rodent Wednesday posting on their social media page.

The members of the Committee had positive comments about the report and commended Mr. Ramdin on his effort. The chair asked that there be further development of the report so that it becomes an actual plan with timelines for implementing the action items, a determination if the timelines are being met, and an evaluation of the action items to determine if they are effective. It was noted that the report has not been seen by the departments at this time, but will be shared with them prior to the next meeting of the working group.

The residents attending were then asked if they had any comments. Their comments included the following:

- 1) How will Mr. Ramdin know if a complaint received by the Health Department has been successfully addressed? It was noted that a ticket is established for each complaint and it cannot be closed until the issue is resolved. It was also mentioned that when the new 311 system is in place there will be a similar process for tracking and closing a case/complaint.
- 2) In response to concern that rodents are not just on the site of major construction projects but find their way to adjacent streets, like Birch Street where Ms. Russo lives, it was suggested that the Planning Board and ZBA require a developer to expand their rodent control plan to adjacent streets as a condition for their permit and that the working group consider how this can be done.
- 3) Is there consideration of using fertility drugs to control the rodent populations? Mr. Ramdin said use of birth control methods must be used in combination with other methods.

4) What preventive measures are being considered at Moxley Park given the construction of the high school swing space, the increase number of students who will be sharing the cafeteria in the Middle School, and the likely increase of food waste? There are only two bait boxes there put out by DPW. Mr. Ramdin will reach out to the Director of Public Buildings tomorrow to discuss the issue, send one of his staff to review the area, and bring the issue to the working group.

5) Concern was raised about how the public can see if a rodent complaint has been addressed. The suggestion is that a resident should sign up for See Click Fix where they can see what complaints have been logged in, however it is unclear if the resident can see what has happened to address a complaint.

6) There was a suggestion that the City conduct a major social media push to publicize what the Health Department is doing about rodent control and how to log a complaint. Also is there a way the Department can publish the results of its control activities that are targeting a particular neighborhood hot spot. Mr. Ramdin will look into how this might be possible.

7) There are major concerns about a significant rodent problem on Summer Street near Saltonstall Park. The concerns are the open dumpster in the parking lot of the Boys and Girls Club and the buildup of leaves and tree limbs in the area. While five traps have been placed in the area, the leave and tree limbs which are used for harbinger by the rats need to be removed. Mr. Watkins will address this issue with Bob Dirico and with the contractor who maintains the park tomorrow. It was also noted by the resident living on Summer Street that rats have eaten through the Black Earth compost bins and the Republic trash totters. Mr. Ramdin will bring these issues to the attention of the working group.

Councilor Bays made a motion to adjourn, Councilor Gannon seconded the motion and it was passed 3 – 0.

Minutes were prepared by Councilor Palomba

Rodent Control and Management Activities



Introduction

Rodent Control is a community effort where the City and Public have actions that they can engage in to reduce the rodent risks in Watertown. Rats are said to have arrived in the United States (US) in the 18th century on ships from Europe. These rats have spread across the US, have become pests, and pose a public health threat. Pests may spread diseases through their bites, rat droppings, contamination of food and water sources or act as vector of diseases through ticks, and fleas ([About Rats and Mice | US EPA](#), 2022). The threat to the population's health can be as direct as above or they can damage or destroy plants and animals, crops, property, and food supplies.

Overview and Description of problem

The main rat of concern to the City of Watertown, MA is the Norway Rat (*Rattus Norvegicus*) or Brown rat. It has been suggested by some researchers and pest control industry experts, that the explosion of rats is in part due to the closure of many businesses, restaurants, schools and other commercial entities during the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Sarkodie & Owusu (2021), Parsons, Kiyokawa, Richardson, et al., (2020), Kiyokawa, Tanikawa, Ootaki, & Parsons, (2022). The closures cut off these rodent's main food source. This has led to rats leaving their normal habitats, mainly outdoors, to migrate to non-traditional areas in local neighborhoods in search of shelter and food indoors. Anecdotal evidence indicates that:

- The milder winters over the past few years also contribute to the increasing rodent population.
- Construction and other noisy activities that includes digging and vibrations displaces the rodent population from their burrows.
- Rats require food, harborage (a place to shelter), and water to survive.
- One hundred percent elimination of rats in the community is not feasible. Therefore, 'Rodent Control Activities' are focused on decreasing the rat population and their negative impact on humans and our environment.
- Personal activities like gardening and not harvesting of vegetables, improper disposal of pet waste, improper storage of trash, improper composting, bird feeding etc., home landscaping and unoccupied/improperly maintained property has contributed to providing rodent harborage food and water.

City Response/Control Activities

The City Council on Human Services (Councilors' Anthony Palomba - Chair, Caroline Bays, and John Gannon) has been holding a series of public meetings to discuss the rodent activity/concerns in Watertown.

The Health Department has been tasked to lead the municipal efforts and response/control activities.

An internal rodent control working group was formed to discuss the internal activities that influence rodent control in Watertown. The main discussion points are:

- Identify individual departmental rodent control activity/ response.
- Identify duplication and gaps in those control activities.
- Establish coordinated response to reduce duplication and gaps while ensuring the highest level of response to rodent activity is afforded to the citizens of Watertown.
- Facilitate a reduction in rodent impact in Watertown by utilization of public/ private activities by educational, prevention, treatment, and regulatory responses.
- Develop a community wide rodent control plan/guidance.

The City is requiring all its contractors to use non-second generation anti-coagulant rodenticides (non-SGAR) so that the secondary impact on non-target animals are reduced. It should be noted that while the City can control the use of non-SGAR's on public projects or projects that it permits it cannot restrict the use of SGAR's on private property.

Further, a number of non-poison "Smartboxes" are deployed across the community by the DPW.

The City Manager in the (recently submitted) FY 2024 budget has provided for increased funding to the Health Department for rodent control activities and a new Health Officer position that will coordinate rodent control response and education activities in the City.

Response Activities

Community Planning and Development

Issue: Development and construction activities has the potential to displace rodents from their habitats and drive them into neighborhoods

Responsibilities

- Planning and Zoning Board of Appeals issue planning permission to developers to build on and redevelop property in Watertown.

Current Status

- Pre- Construction meetings are held with the developer to identify concerns. Rodent control is a standard concern that the developer is advised on; including pest mitigation activities prior to and during construction, selection of landscaping , design control and waste storage so that does not support rodent harborage.

- Public Meetings held to enable public input.
- Issuance of permission with conditions
- Conditions require development of rodent mitigation and treatment prior to and during construction.
- Provide Notification to Health and other Departments on list of conditions issued
- Monitoring by the Health and Zoning Departments to ensure compliance with Planning conditions on rodent Control.
- Enforcement of increased rodent activity is done by the Health Department utilizing Nuisance laws.

Action Item

Provide copies of the Planning Board and ZBA conditions to the Health Department by adding them to distribution list for Board(s) decision(s)

Building Department

Issue: Building demolition and construction activities have the potential to displace rodents and impact harborage. Further construction through improper waste and soil management can provide rodent harborage, food and water that facilitates increases in the rodent population.

Current Status

- Demolition permits are required by the Building Department and several Departments have requirements that must be met prior to the issuance of the permit(s).
- The Health Department has a requirement for a rodent survey and treatment prior to demolition. This included at least 2 pest control visits which are spaced at least one week apart. If rodent activity is noted on property a rodent mitigation plan is required and property must show significant reduction in rodent activity before the demolition is allowed to proceed.
- Construction permits are issued by the Building Department. Guidance on ensuring that the site is properly managed and adequate rodent controls are in place thereby reducing harborage for rodents. The Health and Zoning Departments monitor sites to ensure pest control activities are adequate and that sources of food, water and harborage are significantly controlled and that impact is adequately managed.

Action Items

- Health Department will review the Demolition and Building Guidance documents and provide updated documents within 1 week for posting on Opengov permitting portal
- The Health Department will collaborate with Building Department on ongoing construction and ensure the facilities are following rodent mitigation plans.

Zoning Department

Issue: Vacant and abandoned properties have the potential to harbor rodents and other pests.

Current Status

- The Zoning and Health Departments monitor these sites to ensure that this risk of rodent harborage is significantly reduced and work collaboratively to reduce community risk/impact. These actions include outreach to property owners to gain compliance. If that fails then notices orders to correct, fines and court action are pursued utilizing Zoning and Public Health laws.
- We are seeking to develop an inventory of vacant/abandoned properties.
- A Problem properties working group is currently being established, to ensure problem properties can be identified and a unitary approach to compliance is facilitated.

Action Items

- Call meeting of problem properties working group in 1 month
- Develop inventory of vacant/ abandoned properties in Watertown within 6 months
- Review laws and ordinance that impact these properties to see if they are adequate and if not make recommendation for updating City Ordinance to City Manager for forwarding to City Council

DPW

Road Construction and Excavation activities

Issue: Road Construction and excavation has the potential to displace rodent harborages and leave their burrows.

Current Status

- The DPW requires private entities that engaged in major excavation in the public way to develop rodent control and response. Implementation prior to and during the activities.
- The DPW is going to be engaged in major construction of the Mt. Auburn/Arsenal Street corridor. They have engaged a pest control contractor to treat rodents at the surface and sub-surface levels.

Action

No action needed.

Waste Management

Issue: Improper trash handling can contribute to providing food and water sources for pests. The challenges of poor trash management practices by residents including placement of trash out on

curbside days in advance of collection. Improper/illegal dumping is a source of food and harborage of pests.

Current Status

- The City provides trash pick-up services and curbside food waste collection.
- Increased surveillance by addition of a Recycling and Sustainability Coordinator has led to increased community outreach and increase in proper trash management techniques.

Action Items

- Increase regulatory actions related to improper trash disposal.
- Increase Citizen awareness on proper backyard composting techniques, trash storage and other waste disposal issues.

Parks and other Public Properties

Issue: The City manages parks, cemeteries and other open spaces; improper utilization of these properties can allow for the provision of food, water and harborage of rodents.

Current Status

- The use of the Parks for events is permitted by the Recreation Department. They have clauses in their rental agreement to ensure that trash food waste/ spills etc. are removed by the permitted at the end of their event.
- The DPW Parks and Cemeteries Divisions are responsible for maintenance of open spaces they provide for rodent control in these areas. Additionally, trash is routinely picked up from city trash receptacles by a dedicated team.
- The Department investigates potential rodent harborage sites and remediates in a timely manner any potential harborage conditions.
- Illegal dumping and improper disposal of waste including windblown trash is removed routinely by the DPW department.

Action Items

- Survey Parks and Recreational areas to identify potential /existing rodent harborages and take action to reduce eliminate the harborage conditions.
- Continue responding to dead animal removal requests from residents.
- Continuing utilization of non-SGAR rodenticides that pose minimal risk to non-target animals.
- Start discussions on single pest control provider for general pest control that is not trademarked, or single source supplied.

Public Buildings

Issue: Improper maintenance of dumpsters and other trash disposal activities including food spillages, rodent access points into buildings and ongoing school construction activities can provide for increased activity.

Current Status

- All school construction activities require the establishment of a rodent control and management plan including pre-treatment and in construction activities to reduce rodent burden that may be increased by construction activities.
- Increased surveillance of the dumpsters is done, and custodians are reminded to ensure that dumpsters are kept closed except when in active use.
- The School Department is required by law to have an integrated pest management plan that addresses how pest infestations are to be addressed and show that the school community is not placed at risk because of pest control.

Action Items

- Continue monitoring of Facilities and dumpsters to reduce food, and water access to rodents and harborage conditions.
- Require construction contractors to provide rodent control plans and reports to the Health Department

Health Department

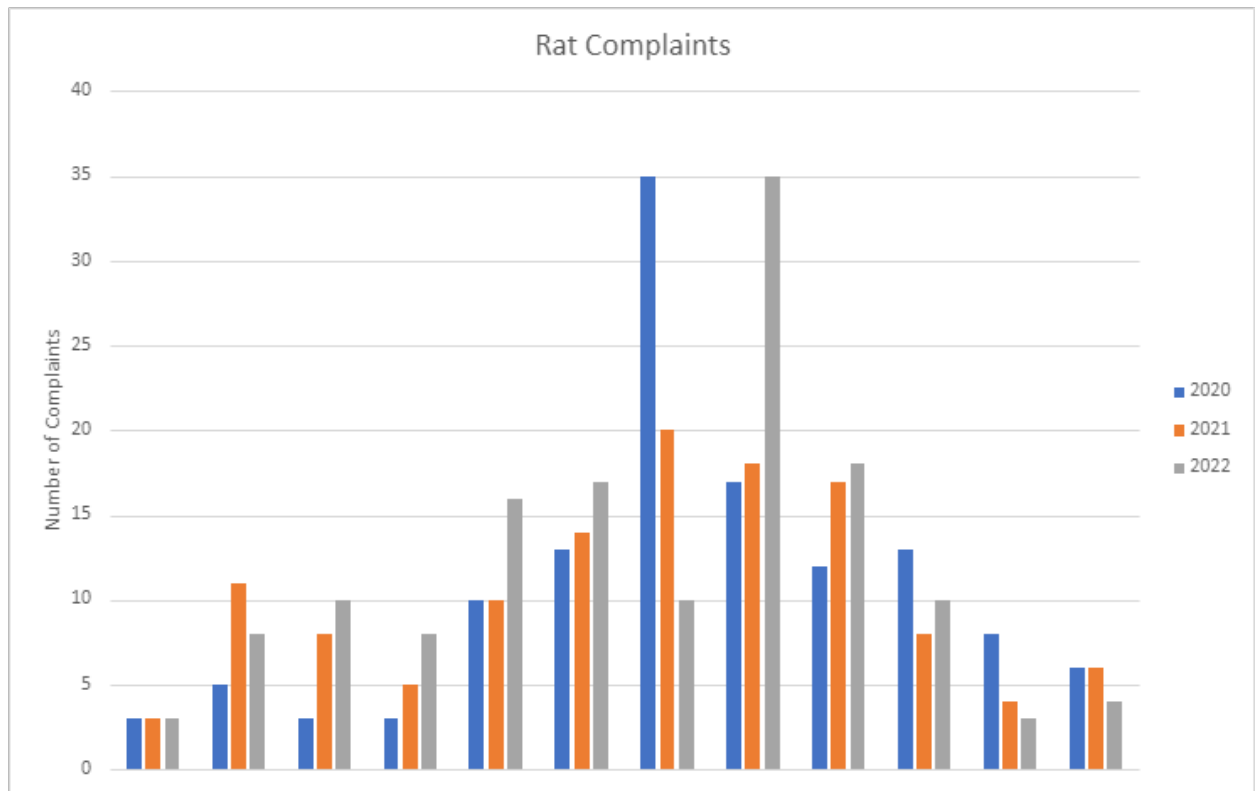
Issue

Rodent control is a community wide issue and has the potential to impact the health and wellbeing of the residents of Watertown.

Current Status

Complaint investigation

- Complaints on rodent activity are received by the Health Department through phone calls, emails, or the see click fix portal. These complaints are assigned to a Health Officer for investigation and action. The Health Officer will visit the site and seek to identify the root causes of the complaint. Once there is some identification, action is taken to remediate the problem. Dependent on the situation an Order to Correct is issued, with specific timelines for correction, fines may be assessed for repeat violations. If the violations continue, we will file a complaint in a court of jurisdiction. Legal filings are done in consultation with the City Attorney.
- The Health Department treats the public ways and sewers in areas if a significant infestation is noted.



Historical data on Rodent Complaints

Action Items

- Acknowledge receipt of complaints received electronically within 24 hours of receipt.
- Increase surveillance and complaint response time to 48 hours maximum with addition of Health Officer in Health Department.
- Provide feedback to complainants who make direct (phone/in person) within 1 day of site visit

Enforcement

Current Status

- The Health Department is authorized to enforce nuisance laws, Food Establishment Regulations, Housing Code and City Ordinances. Each of these regulations has specific procedures for enforcement. Further, there are mandated times in the housing code for response. Dependent on the nature and location of the complaint a specific code will be used. Generally, rodents can be addressed by the housing or nuisance codes.
- The Inspection team has identified problem areas and dumpsters. Each member of the Environmental Health Team does visits twice per week to check on problem areas and dumpster status.
- Complaints are assigned by location and type: geography and code that it is related to. Once it is assigned it is in the Health Officer's workflow. The Health Officer reaches out

to the complainant to get additional information, schedule visit, or get permission to enter property to view the complaint.

Column1	Complaints	Inspections	Tagged	OTC	Tickets	Court	Baited
Dec-22	*4	9	0	2	2	0	3
Jan-23		13	1	3	0	0	5
Feb-23	7	11	0	4	2	1	11
Mar-23	9	12	0	3	0	0	4
Apr-23	12	16	0	6	0	0	5
May-23	7	10	1	5	0	0	1

Table of Complaints and Actions for last 6 months

Action Items

- Continue dumpster surveillance activities.
- Provide timely feedback on actions that will be taken to complainants and updating of information on “See Click Fix”.
- Review current laws and Ordinances especially as it pertains to dumpsters, rodent control and trash handling to see if we need specific regulations by the Board of Health or City Council Ordinances to address same.
- Strict enforcement of laws related to rodent control.

Community Outreach

Current Status

- The Health Department has developed a webpage with guidance on actions that the community can take to reduce the rodent burden. We have also added a rodent Wednesday posting to our social media page that can be found at:
 - <https://www.watertown-ma.gov/627/Rodent-Control>
 - <https://www.watertown-ma.gov/1014/Social-Media-Accounts>

Action Items

- Seek to enhance ways the public is getting information and increase followers/members on social media.
- Provide quarterly articles on Rodent control to Watertown news.

- Develop more community education tools especially in Warmer months and fall. That would provide information to residents on reducing rodent risks that can be enhanced by gardening and other home activities.
- Identify updated resources and ensure that the information on the webpages provide advice simply and in an easy to read and is readily understood
- Develop other tools post July if new Health Officer position for Rodent Control is approved.
-

What Can I Do?

● to reduce rodent activity ●

Water

Eliminate all water sources from your property.
Dump out any water inside buckets or toys.

Food

Bring your garden fruits and veggies inside as soon as they are ripe. Keep all trash bins with food completely closed. Maintain compost bins properly.

Shelter

Keep your yard maintained so that rodents cannot live in overgrown bushes, shrubs, or clutter.

Food, water, and shelter is all a rodent needs to survive. Eliminate these from your property to help reduce rodent activity in Watertown.



Rodent Burrows identified and treated on Private land.

Bag Your Trash

Make sure to bag your trash before you place it in your bin with the lid closed!

WHY?

Loose trash can escape when its windy or during pickup leaving items for rats to live in and or eat!!!



DO NOT BAG RECYCLABLES



**The City of Watertown: Dumpsters
& Nuisance Control Regulations.**

Board of Health City of Watertown Nuisance Control
Regulations: Section 3-part (a) states in part that:

"The owner of any building or structure used for business
or habitation shall be responsible for maintaining the
building or structure and the property associated with
the building or structure in a sanitary condition free of
garbage, rubbish, and other filth or health hazards."
Each violation is considered a separate offense.

You may be fined up to \$300 per violation of the Board of
Health Regulations pursuant to MGL Chapter 40, § 21D
(Non-Criminal Disposition).

These fines are as follows:

\$25.00 For First Offense
\$50.00 For Second Offense
\$100.00 For Third Offense
\$300.00 For Fourth Offense, and Any Further Offenses

Alternatively, you may be fined upon conviction in a court
of jurisdiction up to \$1000 per violation in accordance
with the MA General Laws Chap 111 s 123.

Each day of a continuing violation shall constitute a
separate offense and shall be subject to a separate penalty.
If you have any questions concerning this matter, please
call the Health Dept. at (617) 972-6446.

REMINDERS:

- Ensure dumpsters are of sufficient size and
capacity to eliminate overflowing and allowing
lids to close all the way.
- Ensure dumpster lids are closed when not in use.
- Keep up with routine cleaning to avoid offensive
odors and unwanted rodent activity.



City of Watertown
Health Department
Administration Building
149 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472

Phone: 617-972-6446
Fax: 617-972-6499
www.watertown-ma.gov

Address: _____
Date: _____ Time: _____ AM/PM
Note: _____

Employee: _____

Door Hanger Nuisance and Dumpster



**The City of Watertown: Dumpster
Maintenance & Food Establishments.**

**105 CMR 590.00 MA Food Establishments
Regulations s. 501.15: Outside Receptacles.**

(A) Receptacles and waste handling units for REFUSE, recyclables, and returnables used with materials containing FOOD residue and used outside the FOOD ESTABLISHMENT shall be designed and constructed to have tight-fitting lids, doors, or covers.

(B) Receptacles and waste handling units for REFUSE and recyclables such as an on-site compactor shall be installed so that accumulation of debris and insect and rodent attraction and harborage are minimized and effective cleaning is facilitated around and, if the unit is not installed flush with the base pad, under the unit.

If violation continues and is repetitive, the Board of Health can suspend your permit to operate.

Alternatively, you may be fined up to \$300 per violation of the Board of Health Regulations pursuant to MGL Chapter 40, § 21D (Non-Criminal Disposition).

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Address: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ AM/PM

Note: _____

Employee: _____