

Don't Overlook Residential Garage Doors as Routes of Entry For Rodents



For private residences, attached garages of suburban homes are one of the main entry points for rodents. Although garage doors may be relatively tight when installed, rarely are they maintained in this manner on an annual basis by homeowners. Moreover, most people are not aware of the important but subtle difference between a door that is closed and a door that is closed and tight. Consider the long crevice along the base of a “closed” garage bay door.

With garage doors that are not tightly pest proofed, the crevice at the base of the door allows for the escape of attractive warm air currents during the hot summer months. Food odors produced within a residence several times daily also seep out of garage door crevices, providing yet another strong pest attraction.

SEAL CRACKS OR GAPS. You’ve heard it said that if a rat can get his head through an opening, he can get the rest of his body through, too. To truly rat-proof a building, you need to eliminate every critical opening that is larger than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Caulk openings beneath sinks, stoves and dishwashers. Use concrete or masonry grout to fix cracks in foundations and floors. Check roof joints and the areas where chimneys and fireplaces come through the floor from the cellar or crawlspace. Look for gaps around ground floor or below-grade windows and window wells.

REPAIR HOLES. Use strong materials such as $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch hardware cloth, welded wire mesh, sheet metal plates, concrete mortar, copper gauze or steel wool with expanding foam sprayed over it. It’s important to use the right materials for rat-proofing since rats can chew through wood, soft materials, plasterboard, plastic and many other materials.

SEAL OPENINGS AROUND PIPES. Plug gaps around water, gas or heat pipes. For large holes around pipes, use galvanized metal pipe chase covers, sheet metal plates, mortar, plaster of Paris or cement. Wrap pipes that run along walls with sheet metal guards that fit closely to the wall and keep rats from climbing the pipe or cable.

CHECK VARIOUS VENT OPENINGS. Replace or rescreen stove exhaust, clothes dryer, roof, ridge-line or soffit vents. Screen vents with $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch woven or welded hardware cloth or special vent covers; use metal louvers on soffits. Seal space around heat registers, furnace and air conditioning ducts and attic fan openings.

CHECK FOR SEWER ENTRY POINTS. Check sewer outlets, repair broken sewer pipes, screen drains in basements and shower rooms with $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch woven or welded hardware cloth. Commercial floor drains should have a perforated metal drain cover that may need to be screwed down if rats can move it.

PAY ATTENTION TO ROOFS. Roof rats (and sometimes Norways) enter mostly near the roof line. Check attic or gable vents, utility line openings, other openings near the roof line and branches touching the roof. On flat commercial rooftops, look for gaps around headhouses, elevator shafts, pipes and utilities, air conditioning units and other roof structures. Screen rooftop ventilator openings, being careful to not restrict airflow.

PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO DOORS. In commercial applications, add metal kickplates to the outside bottoms of doors, especially those leading to warehouses or food storage areas. Use 26-gauge sheet metal mounted no more than ¼ inch from the bottom of the door. Large commercial doors should close flush to the ground. In warehouses and other areas where people forget to close doors, install automatic door-closers or alarms. Exterior doors should have thresholds with weather stripping, sweeps or strip seals at the base. Garage doors and bay or delivery doors usually need new rubber gaskets at the bottom and sides. Trash chutes, laundry chutes and elevator shafts should be checked for rat access points.

Humans Often Invite the Uninvited



When we consider human efforts to keep rodents and other pests out of buildings, it often is as much rodent denial as it is rodent exclusion. The best rodent-proofed doors using the best technology are of little value if the doors are regularly left open or ajar.

This point is most applicable for commercial facilities, where the most common points of rodent entry are through doors left open by employees. Consequently, all doors of commercial facilities — especially those associated with storing, serving or processing foods — should be fitted with automatic door closers.

In large commercial warehouses and buildings, employees often want to leave doors open to regulate temperature or increase fresh air. If this is done, heavy-duty screen inserts must be used to prevent rodent (and insect) entry. Management must implement programs that stress to all employees the importance of keeping doors closed on a daily basis. Strategically placed door and wall placards emphasizing the importance of pest denial are very effective. But placards must be kept fresh and current (e.g., a different message every four months or so).

Similar to commercial facilities, homeowner habits in residential areas are the cause of many rodent invasions. Even if a garage door is structurally sound and fits tight to the ground, it is common for people seeking fresh air in their own “nests” during the spring and summer months to leave the garage doors fully or partially open most of the day, and up until the time they go to bed at night. Consequently, rodents and insects are often permitted unimpeded entry to houses directly.