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## Rat complaints rise in Boston, but city says it's up to the challenge

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 10, 2012 03:40 PM

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(Brian Feulner for The Boston Globe)

John Meaney, Boston's director of Environmental Services, looked over the trash storage area in an alley behind Hemenway Street in the Fenway on Thursday.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

Reported rat sightings and complaints in Boston are up this year, but city officials say they have been able to prevent the rodent population in check through improved pest control efforts, better public awareness, and because more residents speak out.

“We’re responding quicker, and we have more coverage,” John Meaney, the city’s director of environmental services, said in a phone interview Friday, one day after he and other city officials [announced](#) that an infestation of more than 100 rats and 50 burrows had been found around two apartment buildings in a section of Fenway popular with students.

“An increase in complaints does not mean the rat population is up,” he said.

More reported sightings and complaints are actually a good thing, according to Meaney.

“I don’t see a health or safety issue,” he said. “We’re not doing

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It helps us find them and get it under control," he said. "We want people to call. They're our eyes and ears."

He said the "very, very mild winter" has contributed to a rise in complaints and sightings across the city this year.

Meaney said that the mild winter, spring and summer reduced the natural mortality rate for rats and increased rat breeding. The rodents' food supply was bolstered because as more people spent more time outside due to the warmer temperatures, the amount of trash and food discarded outdoors spiked.

And, a rise in construction activity across the city may have disrupted some rat homes, forcing them to move and elevating the chance of being spotted.

However, in the wake of the winter that never was, Meaney said city officials were prepared and moved aggressively to keep the rat population under control.

The city launched its annual rat awareness and education campaign in March and April, when rat sightings and complaints tend to increase, he said. Officials set up poisoned rat bait around potential problem areas and closely monitored sewers, alleyways, trash dumpsters and parks.

Last year, the city beefed up its pest-stalking staff by adding weekend and overnight shifts for the first time ever, according to Meaney.

So, as the recent string of mild seasons and better public awareness led to a spike in reported rat sightings and related complaints this year, city workers pounced to investigate.

He said there are not a lot of major "hot spots" for rats in Boston and that an increase in sightings and complaints does not necessarily indicate there is a sizeable rat population nearby.

"I could have one rat hit the streets and generate 10 complaints," Meaney said.

Officials target preventative measures, especially in late summer and early fall, around student neighborhoods, particularly Allston, Brighton, Fenway and Kenmore.

He said that rats tend to be most active and visible during the same seasons as

humans.

“It’s like me,” Meaney said. “I’m a little slower in the winter, I pick it up in the spring and fall and I roll along through the summer.”

He said residents and property owners are advised to: keep trash in closed receptacles and to maintain cleanliness both inside and outside of residences.

“The biggest issue is sanitation,” he said. “That’s the key.”

A day after the heavily-covered news of the large Fenway infestation, the phone lines at the city’s inspectional services department were busy, he said. By mid-afternoon, about 15 rat-related complaints had been called in, which is nearly twice the daily average and did not include complaints likely phoned in to other city offices.

“That’s what we want,” said Meaney.

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