



C I T Y O F
RENO
Memorandum

DATE: November 14, 2025
TO: Mayor and City Council
THROUGH: Jackie Bryant, City Manager
FROM: Jenifer Alvarez, Council Liaison
DEPT: City Manager's Office
SUBJECT: Rat Concerns and Jurisdictional Authority

The City of Reno has received an increased number of constituent reports regarding rat activity in several neighborhoods. To clarify jurisdictional responsibilities and identify available options for addressing these concerns, staff reached out to regional partners at Northern Nevada Public Health, Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW), the Nevada Department of Agriculture (NDA), and reviewed relevant statutes and operational practices.

Under NRS 555.500, the Nevada Legislature has determined that control of rodents is primarily the responsibility of each individual landowner or occupier. The broader statute, NRS 555, was written for agricultural pest control and does not directly address urban infestations. As a result, there is no single agency with clear authority for general rat presence in developed areas unless an infestation poses a documented public health, safety, or agricultural hazard.

While NDA maintains authority over rodent-related issues, its ability to intervene is limited. The agency's Predatory Animal and Rodent Control (PARC) Committee is responsible for managing predatory animals, property-destroying birds, and rodents statewide, using a combination of public and private funding. However, PARC's programs are focused largely on agricultural or rural settings and do not extend to neighborhood-level infestations.

Washoe County is the agency with the most direct authority to act when infestations present a health risk or when property owners fail to take necessary action. In such cases, the County can require extermination and impose fines for noncompliance. The County also has the ability to establish a Rodent Control District if more than 50 percent of property owners in an unincorporated area petition for one. Alternatively, a General Improvement District (GID) could be formed to levy taxes for pest management or rodent abatement services. These mechanisms provide possible frameworks for coordinated regional response if desired.

Within the City of Reno, the Maintenance and Operations (M&O) Division inspects sewer systems when reports of rat activity are received. Many City systems are designated as pesticide-free areas, limiting the use of bait stations, but M&O crews monitor and mitigate as needed. Outside of City-owned systems, the City does not have operational authority for rodent control.

To assist residents, the City has provided preventive guidance on reducing attractants and minimizing nesting opportunities to those who reach out. Recommendations include:

- Sealing gaps or openings larger than one-quarter inch with steel wool or mesh
- Securing garbage in sealed containers
- Avoiding outdoor placement of pet food or bird seed
- Trimming dense vegetation
- Removing woodpiles or clutter near buildings
- Eliminating standing water
- Collecting fallen fruit or debris
- Keeping yard clean of pet waste and fallen leaves

These steps help reduce conditions that attract or sustain rodent populations.

The Nevada Humane Society (NHS) also offers a natural deterrent option through its Working Cats Program, which places feral or semi-feral cats in appropriate settings to control rodents. There is no adoption fee, though adopters must provide acclimatization materials and consistent care. The City has coordinated with NHS staff to ensure Reno Direct and City communication channels can share accurate information about this program.

A combination of environmental and behavioral factors has contributed to increased rat populations throughout Reno and other Western cities. Urban infill and redevelopment have displaced rodents from natural habitats, while milder winters have extended breeding seasons and increased survival rates. Readily available food sources, such as fruit trees, unsecured trash, compost, and outdoor feeding areas, have further supported population growth. Regional pest-control reductions during the pandemic also allowed rodent populations to rebound. These conditions are especially evident in older neighborhoods with mature landscaping and accessible food and water sources.

Moving forward, staff will continue to coordinate with NDA, Washoe County, and the Nevada Humane Society to share consistent messaging and promote prevention strategies. Reno Direct will be provided expanded talking points and contact information for relevant programs to ensure residents receive accurate and timely information. This issue will also be added to the City's ongoing list of intergovernmental discussion items with Washoe County for potential regional coordination or district-level exploration.