

# THE STRAITS TIMES

## HarbourFront Centre is latest mall to face rat problem

5 August 2016, By Jalelah Abu Baker



HarbourFront Centre has become the latest mall to face a rat problem, with the National Environment Agency (NEA) taking action against 13 food shops there for failing to keep their premises clean and having rodent droppings.

The NEA did not specify the names of the food shops and the actions taken, but said it has conducted 123 inspections of the "implicated licensed food shops and food stalls within HarbourFront Centre, as well as the common areas", from January to early July this year.

Over the same period, the agency received 15 instances of feedback on rat activity at the mall, a spokesman said.

An inspection on June 30 at the mall had found signs of rat activity at one of the licensed premises, and poor housekeeping and refuse management at another, she added.

Enforcement action will be taken against them, she said.

Ms Jasmine Ong, 34, a business development and public relations director, whose office is at HarbourFront Centre, alerted The Straits Times when she saw a rat emerging from the McDonald's outlet in the mall in June.

"There was (a) commotion. There was a rat scurrying out from under one of the seats," she said.

The NEA told her that there was no rodent activity at the outlet. But it said there was a hygiene lapse, and it will be taking enforcement action.

Replying to Straits Times queries on the lapse, a McDonald's spokesman said the fast-food chain recognises high hygiene standards as an integral part of its business, adding that it has a rigorous cleaning protocol, including regular inspections and preventive treatment for pest control.

"We are also working closely with the landlord and can confirm that they facilitate regular inspections within the mall," she said.

Staff at food courts Food Junction and Bagus, and several other shops, told The Straits Times they had not observed any rat problems.

Mapletree Investments, which manages the mall, said: "Our centre has been monitoring the ground situation closely and has taken the necessary measures. We have been vigilant in our pest control and will continue to work jointly with our vendors and tenants."

The problem at the mall comes shortly after rats were seen earlier, in July and June respectively, at the Marina Bay Financial Centre and Marina Bay Link Mall.

The NEA took more than 200 enforcement actions against premises owners last year, it said on its website.

Operators of food retail establishments found with hygiene lapses, including a failure to keep their licensed premises free from pest infestation may face up to \$2,000 in fines, and demerit points.

Building operators or mall managements whose premises are found to have a rat infestation may also face a fine of up to \$5,000 for the first offence.

The NEA said it is monitoring the situation at HarbourFront Centre and will continue to work with the mall management to ensure that the rat situation is resolved.