



HANK INVESTIGATES: RATS EAT WOMAN'S CAR

PLYMOUTH, MASS. (WHDH) - A local mom says just when she thought 2020 could not get any more bizarre, it did. Rats ate her car! Yes, you heard that right. What happened? Hank Investigates.

What happened to Jackie's car? The inside is tattered and frayed.

Jackie and her kids recently moved to Plymouth. She parks her SUV on the street outside her house and had noticed food left in the vehicle had bite marks.

"It started with just little bags of chips that the kids had left being opened. I was thinking maybe like a little chipmunk, or a mouse had gotten in there," Jackie says.

So, Jackie set some traps and cleaned out her SUV.

"When I first moved here, people had told me that there were rats from the restaurants, but I didn't want to even think that a rat was getting in my car," Jackie says.

But her worst fears were confirmed. She caught not one rat but two.

"I was shocked, even though I had a feeling, I was still shocked," Jackie says.

She set more traps. But the rats kept coming. "A girlfriend of mine came by at night, and she said, 'I don't know how to tell you this, but I just saw two rats running towards your car,'" Jackie says.

Soon they weren't just eating food. The rats started devouring her seats and seat belts.

"It scared me. It grossed me out. All I could think was, 'Oh my gosh, what if I'm driving and, you know, there's one in here, what am I going to do if it bites my son?'" Jackie says.

The radio, speakers, and heated seats stopped working. Jackie brought her car to a mechanic who said the rats had eaten through the vehicle's wiring system.

"I was like, 'This is now really dangerous.' They told me that the rats had actually dragged like a Dunkin Donuts bag up behind the airbag compartment and that it was a miracle the airbags didn't deploy while I was driving," Jackie says.

She called her insurance company and got more bad news: they said her car could not be repaired. It was totaled! "This is insane. This is crazy," Jackie says.

Why did this happen?

Plymouth officials tell us rat complaints are up in the downtown area where Jackie lives. They blame construction that disturbed the rats' nests.

But experts say with so many restaurants closed because of COVID, there's less food in trash cans and dumpsters, so rats are having to find new sources of food.

Plus, people aren't using their cars as much in the pandemic, giving rats more time to feast undisturbed.

"A car works out great because it's a dry place, it's warm, and it's inviting to be for nesting purposes. It's a great shelter," Robert Lockwood from Ehrlich Pest Control says.

Jackie got a new car. And she's hoping the new year does not bring new rats.

"It's like a horror movie," Jackie says.

Experts say now that winter is here, rodents will be looking for more food and shelter. If you're not using your car, you may want to move it each day and check for signs of unwanted visitors.

CDC warning about rats:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/php/rodents.html>

If you have a tip or story idea email TellHank@whdh.com

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SOUTH PORTLAND NEIGHBORHOOD DEALING WITH RAT PROBLEM

by WGME Saturday, January 9th 2021

SOUTH PORTLAND (WGME) -- Rats are turning out to be a big problem in a South Portland neighborhood.

City officials have been getting a growing number of complaints since October.

They're putting out fliers warning about the problem in parts of the Thornton Heights neighborhood near Main Street.

The city says residents should make sure any trash goes in a trash can, pick up any dog waste, make sure there isn't anything lying around the yard and close their garage doors.

Health officials say everyone has to help.

"If there is one outlier, then that population is just going to continue to flourish, because they'll seek that area to feed or habitat or to borrow or what have you," South Portland Local Health Officer Josh Pobrislo said.

The city is unsure what is leading to the growing infestation, but there have been reports elsewhere of rats relocating in the pandemic, with restaurant dumpsters no longer an easy food source for them.

Any complaints can be reported through the city's Office of Public Health.

COCKROACHES, RAT DROPPINGS AMONG REASONS FOR 42 FOOD BUSINESS CLOSURES IN 2020

IRELAND

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JAMES COX

Evidence of rodent infestations and the presence of cockroaches were among the reason for the closure of 42 food businesses in 2020.

The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) today stated that 42 Enforcement Orders were served on food businesses for breaches in food safety legislation in 2020, a decrease of 67 per cent in comparison to 125 Enforcement Orders served in 2019.

The drop in numbers largely reflects the impact of Covid-19, where large numbers of food service businesses were temporarily closed for long periods throughout the year, and is not necessarily due to improved food safety practices.

The FSAI reiterated the importance of robust food safety management systems and stressed that the legal responsibility lies with food businesses to ensure that the food they sell is compliant with food safety legislation and is safe to eat.

Between January 1st and December 31st, 2020, 31 Closure Orders, two Improvement Orders and nine Prohibition Orders were issued by environmental health officers in the Health Service Executive (HSE), veterinary inspectors in the local authorities and officers of the FSAI on food businesses throughout the country.

Filthy conditions

The types of recurring food safety issues that led to Enforcement Orders in 2020 were: unregistered and unsupervised food businesses; filthy conditions; evidence of rodent infestations and rodent droppings; the presence of cockroaches; failure to maintain temperatures of foodstuffs; unsuitable food storage facilities; and improper or lack of water facilities.

Dr Pamela Byrne, chief executive, FSAI stressed the serious nature of a food business being served an Enforcement Order.

She said: "While in a normal year it would be very encouraging to see such a substantial drop in the need for Enforcement Orders, in 2020, however it is likely that most of the reduction reflects the temporary closure of food businesses for many months due to COVID-19 restrictions. Notwithstanding this, 42 Enforcement Orders are still too many, as it shows that, unfortunately, there continues to be a minority of food businesses not complying with their legal requirements."

"All food businesses must recognise that they are legally bound to ensure that the food they produce is safe to eat. Consumers have a right to safe food. Food businesses must comply with food law and all breaches of food safety legislation will be dealt with to the full extent of the law," Ms Byrne added.