



A **TEGNA** Company

# Austin mother lives in fear of diseased rodents biting her kids

December 05, 2017

AUSTIN - Whitney Hastings' South Austin home is overrun with nasty rats.

And she said two months after she first complained to the manager at Woodway Village Apartments in South Austin, the problem persists.

So she contacted the KVUE Defenders for help.

"This is my food and I'm going to throw all of this food away, we haven't even touched any of this," said Hastings as she demonstrated to KVUE.

She's throwing it out because rats have chewed through the containers.

"They've chewed through taco boxes. There's poop in this cabinet," the mother of three said.

"We hear them scratching in the walls, we hear them biting the wood in the walls."

But there's nothing like waking up to a rat squirming around on a sticky trap to drive home the revolting revelation that, "the apartment is infested with rats."

She said she came across her first one in early October.

"And when we saw each other, he took off running and I took off running," Hastings said.

Ever since, it's like a never-ending slumber party in her room. She and the kids hang out and sleep in there.

“We sleep with all the lights on,” she said.

Upstairs is off limits. There are two bedrooms up there but Hastings won't let the kids come up because, all along the hallway, there's evidence of the rats chewing up the carpet.

In the daughter's bedroom, there are rat droppings on the bed.

It's more than just gross for mom. This is a matter of safety for her kids.

“My biggest fear is one of these rats biting one of my kids,” she said. “My son has asthma. They're scared and I'm scared.”

Hastings said she notified management at the Woodway Village Apartments in October.

She's also sent two complaint letters and left messages with the corporate office.

“They won't return any of my calls. They won't return any of my emails,” she said of the corporate office.

The complex did put out sticky traps and sealed up rat holes with spray foam, but almost two months later, the rats are still there.

“They haven't even offered to accommodate me. They haven't offered another unit. They haven't offered to put us in a hotel while they take care of this issue. They haven't offered anything. We just have to be patient. That's what I've been told,” she said.

We encouraged Hastings to call the Austin Code Department. She did and was told it could be close to a week before an inspector could come.

So, the KVUE Defenders called too. The very next day, code inspectors came out.

“We did find a couple of small holes in the roof structure,” said Jim Richerson, an investigator with Austin Code Department.

Evidence of rats and enough to cite the complex, which has 30 days to repair the holes.

But in just seven days, Richerson said, “they have to provide us written proof of service for the rodent control treatment for the building and inside the unit.”

Hastings said after all this, she just wants out of her lease.

“You should be comfortable at home,” she said. “We're not comfortable here. Even if they get rid of them, I still don't want to be here.”

But she said Woodway Village management won't let her out.

So, KVUE's Mike Rush went to Woodway Village management to find out why.

Rush: "Is there any chance this woman will be able to get out of her lease if she wants to leave?"

Manager: "I'm sorry. I have no comment."

Rush: "She's also concerned about the time that it's taken. She's claiming it's taken a couple of months."

Manager: "I don't want to talk."

Rush: "Well, I just want to give you the fair opportunity if there's a different side of the story, which there often is."

Manager: "I understand but, you know, I have to refer you to the attorney."

No answers there for Hastings. No answers for KVUE.

“I've done everything they've asked me to do and they're not budging. They're not letting me out of my lease. No one should be allowed to live like this,” Hastings said.

The Defenders also reached out to Blazer Real Estate in Houston, which owns Woodway Village apartments. But, as of this publication, KVUE did not hear back.

KVUE's Rush did speak with the company's lawyer who told him part of the delay in doing work in her apartment was that Hastings didn't have electricity for a few days.

But there is good news for Hastings.

After Rush called the Austin Housing Authority, leadership there spoke with Woodway Village management who agreed to let the single mom out of her lease and move on as soon as she's ready.