

Military Times

Twenty nine Palms commissary closed indefinitely for rodent problem

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The installation commander at Twenty nine Palms, California, has ordered the commissary closed until further notice after Army veterinarians found evidence of a “significant” rodent problem.

The produce department and the bakery/deli area were closed Wednesday after evidence of rodents was found in those areas of the commissary, located at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms. The entire store was shuttered Wednesday night.

“In recent weeks, the installation had received complaints about produce quality issues, prompting Army veterinarians to increase their inspections of deliveries and produce handling and stocking techniques,” said Defense Commissary Agency spokesman Rick Brink. “Twelve days later, after a Sept. 29 health and sanitation inspection found no ‘substantial complaints,’ the vets found evidence of a significant rodent infestation, prompting the installation commander to order the commissary to close until the issue is fixed.”

That commander, Maj. Gen. William F. Mullen III, “extends his apologies for the inconvenience this closure will cause,” according to a news release from the command.

“The safety, health and well-being of Combat Center patrons is of utmost importance to the commanding general and his staff” the release states.

Defense Commissary Agency officials have dispatched a team of experts — public health, sanitation, engineers, store operations — to the store to find out where the rodents are entering, Brink said.

According to DeCA's director of health and safety, Brink said, "rodent infestation can grow quickly under some circumstances, usually related to weather or construction activity that can disrupt areas where rodents normally reside or create access points to a building. The commissary contracts for pest management services."

DeCA is working with a pest control contractor and military health officials to make sure the facility is thoroughly cleaned and to completely resolve the issues, Brink said.

No illnesses have been reported, said Capt. Karen Holliday, spokeswoman for the combat center.

"While there are no indications that any food is at risk, if commissary patrons choose to return products for a refund, they may do so," Holliday said.

Even though the commissary was closed, a customer service representative will be available and a register will be open for returns and refunds until 7 p.m. local time Thursday.