

Man 'disgusted' by rat infestation in his family's public housing unit in Halifax

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A man living in public housing in Halifax with his wife and four children says he's "disgusted" by the conditions of his family's rat-infested home and that the regional housing authority did nothing but provide "bandage" solutions to the problem for months.

About a week ago, the man and his wife saw a rat crawling around their three-bedroom townhouse in Uniacke Square in the city's north end, he said.

"I felt disgusted. I felt like I wanted to throw up. I can't stand rodents. I hate rodents," the man told The Chronicle Herald. The newspaper is protecting the identity of the man out of his fear of losing his family's home.

His wife, on the other hand, was "horrified" and is experiencing post-traumatic stress from the encounter, he said.

"She's jumping out of her sleep thinking rats are crawling on her and shit like that. Let alone my two young kids that play in this unit on the floors with these rats running around," he added.

The man's immediate reaction was to send his children to stay at his wife's mother-in-law's house overnight. He said he'd do it again in a heartbeat if he sees another rat out in the open.

Housing authority provides 'bandage' solutions

Then, he called the Metropolitan Regional Housing Authority (MRHA), which is responsible for the public housing units in the Uniacke Square area, and said this was "a bit of an emergency."

A maintenance worker showed up the next day at 4 p.m., he said, and stuffed steel wool in a hole in a bathroom where the rat came from — but that didn't seem to make a difference.

"Then maybe two days later, me and my wife see pieces of steel wool on the steps near the bathroom," the man recalled.

"That was a bullshit bandage."

It's not the first time the man has seen or heard rodents crawling around his family home.

He said he and his wife have called the regional housing authority "more than 10 times" in the last two years to complain about mice, but the housing authority did nothing more than provide them with sticky mouse traps to place around their home.

Fast forward to three months ago, when they noticed that they have a rat infestation problem, too.

Although they hadn't seen a rat before Dec. 30, they could hear them making loud "scratching" and "scuffling" noises in the walls, the man said.

The couple called the housing authority a few more times to complain about rats crawling inside their walls, but nobody came to address the problem until they saw a rat in the flesh last week.

The man said he's thought about calling an independent exterminator to deal with the problem, but money is tight.

"I can't afford it," he said.

Housing authority says some pest problems 'can be challenging'

The MRHA declined an interview, but a spokesperson from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing provided an email statement to The Chronicle Herald.

"Professional pest control services are available 24/7 for all public housing units. Pest concerns are identified either during monthly inspections or by a tenant request for service. Tenant requests for pest control services are addressed in a timely manner and emergency situations are responded to immediately," the statement reads.

"We know how the safety and wellbeing of tenants is affected by pests and we use all practical means to prevent them from entering our buildings or eradicating them if needed. Most pest problems are resolved in a reasonable period of time however some situations can be challenging."

Maintenance workers visit home after newspaper hears of issues

Hours after the man told the MRHA that The Chronicle Herald would be visiting his home to take photos, a maintenance crew showed up on Wednesday to address the problem.

The man said "at least three workers" came to look around the house and the maintenance supervisor carried out a thorough inspection.

The man and his wife showed the supervisor some of the holes they noticed around the house and the supervisor also showed them some "gaping holes" they weren't aware about.

The maintenance crew proceeded to patch up holes with spray foam, replaced their stove that was deemed "unsafe," cleaned their basement and reset the traps that were down there and cut open a square in a wall and put in a metal box in the place of drywall to trap rats in it, according to the man.

“They did a bunch of stuff,” he said.

A plumber also came by to look at tubing that was “broken” in the plumbing of the basement, where the rats are believed to have been entering from.

The man said pest control is supposed to be there on Thursday to install a mesh trap in the drywall to catch rats.

All in all, the man said the workers “were super nice and very courteous” and the maintenance supervisor “just talked to us like, you know, human, for once.”

He called it “ridiculous” because “that’s a whole different change of tune” from the way he and his family were treated when maintenance issues came up in the past.

“It’s like, yeah, you came in and did some work, that’s great, but it took them being afraid to get exposed to like actually get up off their asses,” he said.

Having grown up in public housing in Uniacke Square, the man said he has “zero faith” and “zero confidence” in the housing authority.

“I know how people are treated, I know how people’s matters are unresolved,” he said.

Meanwhile, his wife said the fixes are “better all around on our mental health.”

Since the man has a compromised immune system, he said it’s “not healthy to have that level of infestation” in his home.

“I hate living in these kinds of conditions. I hate that this is all that I can afford at the moment,” he added.

He’s abstained from paying his rent since the start of the month in protest.

The man noted his family is not alone and has heard similar complaints of inadequate public housing conditions from his neighbours, which include a Syrian refugee family.

“The rats have been in the whole row of houses for who knows how long. We thought the neighbours were just banging on the walls. We didn’t know why they’re banging on the walls, but they’re banging on the walls because they’re fucking hearing rats and shit in there,” he said.

It’s a problem he said “poor people all over our province” are dealing with, “with no way to fight back or stand up for themselves.”

All the man hopes for, he said, is that his family and others living in public housing will be able to live in their home with some peace of mind. “I just want suitable living conditions, suitable healthy living conditions. Too much to ask? I don’t think so,” he said.

“And for all of us. Not just in my house, but for all of us.”