

RAT PREVENTION GUIDELINES FOR VESSELS

These guidelines¹ can be found in Section 9740.3.6 of the Wildlife Protection Guidelines for Oil Spill Response in Alaska (WPG). All vessels operating in Alaska should follow these guidelines.

State of Alaska law (5 AAC 92.141) prohibits the transport, harboring, or release of specific live rodents, including the Norway rat, the roof rat, and the house mouse. The Norway rat is typically of greatest concern because the species has a wide distribution and rats are excellent swimmers.

Young rats in search of new territories may hop onto your vessel no matter how clean it is. Under the astonished eyes of biologists, a rat streaked down the Dutch Harbor dock and leapt onto the USFWS's M/V *Tigllax* during the M/V *Selendang Ayu* oil spill. Smelly boats will attract more rats, but no boat is immune. Rats could come aboard with freight, vehicles, and containers on cargo ships and ferries. Rats can cause significant damage to boats left unattended in rat-infested ports through the winter or until the next fishing opener. Keep traps set!

Be Knowledgeable and Ready

- Assume any port in the contiguous U.S. (the "Lower 48") has rats.
- Good sanitation is a key to prevention; keep food and garbage in tightly sealed storage areas to avoid attracting rats.
- Familiarize yourself and your crew with rat sign, such as chewed materials, hair, rub marks, feces, and urine. Periodically search dark and concealed spaces for rat sign.

Run a Rat-free Boat

- When tying up in port, look for ways rats could board your boat, and take steps to stop them. Rats are excellent climbers, jumpers, and swimmers.
- Use rat guards on tie-up lines where appropriate.
- Because rats are nocturnal, night lighting on gangways and ramps can discourage their use by rats.
- Seal entry points to your vessel's interior, such as cable chases, and put screens or louvers over windows and vents.
- Inspect and shake out fishing nets and lines before taking them aboard. Rats like to nest and shelter in trawl and seine nets and coils of groundline. Most gear storage facilities do NOT have rat control programs. Soap does not work to protect stored nets from rat damage.
- Inspect cargo for rat sign. Rats can hide in containers and in pallets.

Kill Rats that Get Aboard

- Learn more about rat identification and environmental impacts from rats on the ADF&G [Invasive Species — Norway Rat \(*Rattus norvegicus*\)](#) webpage.
- When tied up in rat-infested ports, deploy traps or poison bait stations near any possible spot a rat could board.
- Use multiple approaches. Deploy snap traps, sticky boards, and poison. Put traps where rat sign is found, in dark and concealed spaces, and near food or garbage.

¹ Guidelines adapted from information available on the [StopRats.org](#) web page.

- Use fresh bait and be patient. Rats are wary of new items in their environment and often will not take bait for days or even weeks after it is introduced.
- If you catch one rat, do not assume it is the only one. Re-deploy traps.
- As a last resort you may need to have the vessel fumigated.
- Never throw a live rat overboard. They are strong swimmers and may reach land.

Speak Up and Spread the Word

- Tell the harbormasters in the ports you patronize that you expect effective rat prevention as part of the service you pay for.
- Report rat sightings, and especially a rat invasion of your boat, to the harbormaster.
- Ask about rat control where you store your gear.
- Spread the word to the fleet.