

## Mouse Infestation

UCU health & safety advice has had 3 enquiries about mice at work. One concerned a big infestation that wasn't being dealt with effectively by the employer; one was the discovery of a corpse on the worktop in the staff kitchen, and because mice are fairly secretive and keep out of our way, if you have a single corpse it's probably symptomatic of a more extensive problem; and the third was a college refectory that was selling crisps with neat little holes chewed in the packets by the mice in the storeroom; the cashier said that the manager knew it was happening, but was leaving it to the summer break before doing anything!

Mice (and rats) in the workplace present a biological hazard and a potentially serious health issue. Cleaning for biological hazards needs to be better and more thorough than for ordinary circumstances; the average damp-rag or spray polish wipe-over is not sufficient to deal with a biological hazard. Bleach solutions are good for killing bacteria, and there are cleaners with bactericides available. But dealing with the infestation, then preventing a recurrence is the aim.

Mice don't just deposit faeces; they are incontinent and dribble all over the place as they go - both are biological hazards. The kitchen is a particularly bad place as it's where food is prepared, so the contamination risks are much higher. Mice in the staff room will get on your desk or elsewhere in your work area, they can fall 8 feet without harm from a suspended ceiling; they can jump and climb well; if you touch contaminated surfaces you can transfer material to elsewhere on your body; get it on your sandwiches or coffee mug, touch your lips, lick your fingers, even rub your eyes - all of which have the possibility to transfer infection.

Some infections mice can pass on in urine are quite nasty and potentially fatal:

- **Lymphocytic choriomeningitis (LCMV)**, which is particularly hazardous for pregnant women - it is linked to foetal damage;
- **Leptospirosis or Weils Disease** - difficult to diagnose initially as it presents like other respiratory infections; a well-known hazard for sewer and workers on rivers and canals, unlikely to be diagnosed unless there is the connection to water. No known cure and usually fatal - see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leptospirosis>;
- **Salmonellosis** - responsible for a range of potentially fatal and almost always serious infections - commonly known as salmonella poisoning, and
- **Tularemia** is a bacterial disease caused by *Francisella tularensis* and is most commonly found in wild rodents. Although rare, it can cause osteomyelitis, pericardial infection, meningitis and pneumonia.

Mice are also a safety hazard - they chew electricity cables to the core, which can cause fires, and in the wrong places, electric shock. Surprisingly, cable-chewing mice and rats seem to avoid being electrocuted although no-one is quite sure how. One USA website claims rodents are responsible for more than one billion dollars damage annually.

Infestation can be a symptom of poor hygiene, poor building quality & maintenance, and poor cleaning standards - these provide mouse heaven; access, a food supply and undisturbed places to nest and breed. One pair of mice can be responsible for several hundred offspring a year over 3-5 generations. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House\\_mouse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_mouse) for breeding information; also [http://www.salford.gov.uk/i/Rodent\\_-\\_fact\\_sheet\\_1.pdf](http://www.salford.gov.uk/i/Rodent_-_fact_sheet_1.pdf) for additional general information.

A simple inspection for droppings, often under units, and close to walls or piles of files or documents (mice like to run along walls where it is safer) will help identify a problem. If you find droppings, report them to management with the demand that the employer treats infestation seriously and deals with it quickly.

Your employer will probably need to take some professional advice from a pest control firm and, unpleasant though it is, get some traps in place. New buildings are as likely to have mice as old ones. If employers don't act quickly, see if you can catch one or two overnight (bait a standard mousetrap with a bit of Mars Bar or peanut butter, and wear some protective gloves to handle the bodies) and show the bodies to management in the morning to encourage some action. If you know the HSE Inspector, drop them an e-mail, though this may not help much.