

The Truth About Rats: In New York, They Don't Reign Supreme

By Laura Anglin, Deputy Mayor for Operations

There can never be too few rats in New York City. And, as recent *New York Times* reporting makes clear, most New Yorkers seem to agree. There's no disputing that the rat issue has been worsening over the last decade – and this is exactly why Mayor Bill de Blasio announced his Neighborhood Rat Reduction initiative in July 2017. However, the *Times* and its partner, OpenTheBooks.com, misrepresented some important facts about rats in the City and the results of the Neighborhood Rat Reduction initiative.

While it's true that rat sightings have increased 38% from 2014 to 2018, it's equally important to note that rat complaints are significantly down since 2017. New Yorkers registered 9% fewer complaints for rat sightings in 2018 compared to 2017. That was the first decrease in seven years and the biggest decrease in 12 years. And contrary to what was reported, City data doesn't show an ominous "upswing" – it shows that from January to April this year, 311 has received 105 more calls than it did during the same time period in 2018. Hardly enough to suggest the rats are taking over.

The article also ignores and misrepresents important data that helps tell the full story of the City's battle with rodents. Importantly, it fails to provide context about 311's overall growth. 311 has seen tremendous growth in the 15 years it has been in existence – in 14 of those years, New Yorkers have submitted more requests than the year before. From 2014 to 2018 311 requests of all kinds are up 23%, from 2.6 million to 3.2 million. That big increase makes sense, as more New Yorkers learn to use the service and opt to submit quickly and easily on the 311's digital channels. Today 52% of New Yorkers contact 311 on the mobile app, online, social media, and text, compared to just 26% in 2014. And we celebrate that more New Yorkers are contacting 311 – it is an important tool that helps us provide better services to New Yorkers. What's more, the misrepresentation of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's inspection results is concerning. The article notes that the number of properties failing inspections has increased, but it fails to note that the number of inspections we're conducting overall has increased too, from 95,994 inspections in 2014 to 178,462 in 2018. What is more relevant is the *percent* of properties that failed inspection: 11.2% of properties inspected by DOHMH failed inspection for active rat signs in 2014, while 11.5% failed in 2018. Since 2014, the failure rate inched up 0.3%, which really means that even though we are conducting more inspections now than in 2014, the number of properties failing those inspections has remained relatively steady.

What's really missing from the story is the major impact we've had in the neighborhoods that need the most help. The \$32 million dollar program undertaken by the City in 2017 was primarily focused on three zones with the most severe rat issues. While rat sightings reported to 311 are down 9% citywide in 2018 compared to 2017, the three zones in our Neighborhood Rat Reduction initiative have seen even more significant declines:

- 25% decline in the Bronx zone (The Grand Concourse)
- 24% decline in the Brooklyn zone (Bed-Stuy and Bushwick)
- 23% decline in the Manhattan zone (Chinatown, Lower East Side, and East Village)

In addition to DOHMH's inspections of private property, we have partnered with the Parks Department, Department of Education, and the Housing Authority to improve waste management and the rat situation on City property. Since we started tracking the data in 2017, we have seen:

- 68% improvement in how the 119 schools in the zones are managing their garbage
- 66% decline in the number of rat burrows at the 10 priority developments the Mayor [announced](#) in April 2018 (a success we are now scaling to all 59 developments in the zones)
- 41% decline in burrows at the 131 parks in the zones

The Neighborhood Rat Reduction initiative is working and we are committed to continue to build on our success. Rats are not an easy opponent, but we will never accept a world in which the rat reigns king.

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