



Andrzej Berndt from the INSE-TOX company uses the „fogger” to pinpoint the location of tunnels dug by the rats. That’s the first thing for the exterminator to do: determine the passages rats use to get into the human world.

PEOPLE AND RATS, ALWAYS TOGETHER

Hundreds of thousands of them live beneath our feet. They become a problem when they leave their underground world. We employ the best and newest chemicals in the war on rats, but we can win only battles.

Małgorzata Oberjan

„O, szczurek, jedź!” - wolają

Włodzimierz Dembeżyński.

odpadki, ścieki, zwierzęce odchody. Z tym wszystkim ma się kontakt.

Jak hodujemy szczury

marchewka bardzo się szczurom podoba...

Stromicidlo: - Skorodowane rury, łatwe do nagryzienia (szczury muszą nieustannie ścierać siekacze)

pucającymi fronty, a brudy i rupiecie chowającymi na tyłach posesji.

Nie segregujemy śmieci. Masowe deratyzacje bywają takimi często tylko z nazwy. W Toruniu się tego

uszy. Małe oczy. Wzrok słaby (nie rozróżnia kolorów), za to doskonałe węch i słuch.

Adres: zamieszkuje nory na terenie ludzkich osiedli, wewnątrz

ŻELNI ŁYŚCICY CZYLI PÓŁ NIECZYNNI ŚWIATŁEM. TRUDNIEMU POJAWIA SIĘ WŁOCYŃ, GUY UPUSZCZAJĄ CZYLI POCZYNIAJĄ ŻYWIĆ. DO WŁOCYŃ ZE SZCZURAMI ZAPRZĘGNIĘTO NAJNOWOCZEŚNIEJSZĄ CHEMIĘ, ALE WYGRAĆ MOŻNA JEDYNIĘ BITWY.

Margorzata Oberlan

„Look, here comes the rat!” That is what people in Włocławek say, seeing Włodzimierz Dembczyński’s company car.

„I’m not offended by it. The same goes for ‘ratcatcher’, but it’s an old term. We call ourselves disinfection technicians,” says the owner of the Rattus company (22 years in the business).

„In our company it’s technician or disinfectant”, adds Monika Łazarska from Włocławek-based Mefisto. „I started in this business in 1983, out of necessity. As an activist for the Polish trade union Solidarność I didn’t have much choice, because I needed to support my wife and daughter”, recalls Jan Stromidło from Toruń, a graduate of K.U.L. (Catholic University of Lublin) and the owner of INSE-TOX.

„To be honest, it’s a dirty job. If I could go back to the beginning, I would’ve chosen a different line of work”, admits Jerzy Hammerling from Bydgoszcz (25 years of experience).

GOOD TO KNOW

They eat, contaminate, destroy the installations

- In places where they feed, rodents destroy much more food products that it may seem from the simple multiplication of the number of rats by their daily food requirements – they only consume about 10%, the other 90% they contaminate with droppings or destroy the packaging.

„Underground tunnels, waste, sewage, animal droppings. You come in contact with that stuff all the time.”

HOW PEOPLE BREED RATS

One thing is certain. Since there are dozens of disinfection companies in Bydgoszcz, Toruń and Włocławek, it means that exterminating rats is profitable.

European Union directive from 2004 which obliges all food manufacturers to sign a contract with a disinfection specialist helps to fuel the demand for such services. However, there are numerous other reasons connected with why rats keep our company so eagerly and in such great numbers.

Hammerling: „The stupidest thing to do is feeding kitties and birds in the backyards. Old ladies think they feed nice animals, but instead they nurture rats.”

Dembczyński: „The elderly conserve water. The lady of the house pours the leftover soup into the toilet and flushes it frugally. The carrots floating in the sewers are welcomed by rats...”

- According to FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) in many regions touched by famine the rats are partly responsible for the tragic situation. They not only destroy the food but also the seeds kept for sowing the following year.

- In search of food, rats also destroy the infrastructure: chew through cables, destroy the pipes, burrow beneath the foundations of buildings.

Stromidło: „Corroded pipes, easy to bite through (rats have to continuously abrade their incisors) are the norm in Poland. The botched jobs, left-overs from PRL, also make it easier for rodents. We encounter broken or badly placed pipes all the time. Luckily, the new pipes placed in Toruń under ISP, make it much harder for rats to go through.

Tomasz Parlon, Robex, Bydgoszcz: „Waste chutes in housing developments, e.g. in Wyżyny or Kapuścińska, are a perfect environment for rodents.”

Zygmunt Jeszka, Toruń: „Ongoing repairs, like in the Old Town, leave rats without homes. Scared by the noise machines make, they go to the surface in search of food and shelter. Lately, we’ve been called to the Old Town almost every day”.

We are dirty, cleaning the façades for show and, at the same time, keeping garbage and junk in the backyard. We don’t sort our waste. Mass disinfections are such often only in name.

„In Toruń people abide by it. In Włocławek the town officials made it a public

project, but they didn’t enforce it”, regrets Dembczyński. „I have a professional perversion: wherever I go, I look beneath my feet, searching for signs of rats. I can see that there are more and more holes in the lawns. Those are exits of tunnels dug by rats.”

ENEMY’S INTELLIGENCE

Rattus norvegicus (common names: brown rat, sewer rat, Norway rat).

Description: 300 g of weight, 200-250 mm in length (head and body), tail up to 200 mm in length. Thick and stiff fur, dark brown on the back, belly grey or white. Small, hairy ears. Small eyes. Poor vision (rats can’t distinguish colors), but perfect sense of smell and hearing.

Address: holes near human settlements, inside and outside the buildings and in the sewers. Bad climber, great swimmer. Character: conservative. Avoids unknown objects, for instance trays with bait.

Food preferences: omnivore; consumes about 0.3 da of food per day, drinks

water or seeks out food with high water concentration.

The second rat species seen in Poland is Rattus rattus (black rat, ship rat). Smaller and lighter, but with a longer tail. Has sleeker fur and bigger eyes than the Norway rat although similarly bad vision. Doesn’t dig holes, usually nests in the walls, attics or trees. It’s behavior is erratic, more unpredictable than Rattus norvegicus.

Both species are extremely fertile.

„Females are ready for copulation every 3-4 days. They can copulate with multiple males at that time. Pregnancy lasts about 26 days. On average, there are 8-10 young in the litter, but sometimes even more than a dozen”, explains Włodzimierz Dembczyński.

Additionally, the statistical rat female has 7 litters a year. There are whole cities under our feet – true rat metropolises.

Rat is a very smart opponent – all specialists agree. „You can get aggressive, fast-acting poison. In case of a big group of rats it’s pointless.



Rodent mascots don’t scare anyone. They welcome INSE-TOX’s clients.



Real rats often provoke fear and disgust.

reportaż

M13

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Where is the enemy? People developed such contraptions as a camera with a very long fiber optic cable. The camera goes underground and we can watch everything on a monitor, or even record it on a DVD.



nie. - Samice gotowe są do współżycia

Intensywne remonty

najbardziej wytrzymałych elementów

When rats notice that one after another of their comrades die, they will stop consuming the poisoned food," says Jan Stromidlo. "After all these years in the business, I still sometimes can't figure out why some rats eat the particular kind of poisoned bait and others don't. In general, it should be something hard and crunchy, oats-based. But there are no universal recipes."

Poison, drown, shoot...

Nowadays, exterminators have a wide spectrum of poison to choose from. Granules, pastes or cubes which contain coagulants, hormonal baits, ingredients which stop hunger (it shortens the disinfection time and prevents secondary poisoning) and so-called gromax – a bitter substance which prevents birds, cats or humans from ingesting the poison. "Lack of hunger, dejection, death. It takes several days. In case of fully grown, most resilient specimens, unfortunately even more than 10 days," describes Dembczyński.

Sometimes disinfection is unsuccessful. In rural areas people still use not only cats, but also dogs, e.g. German Shepherds, to fight rats. When unleashed, they can cause a blood bath. In the cities, you sometimes need to... shoot.

"I had a situation like this in an apartment building on Bażyńskich Street. The client went on holiday, left the apartment empty. She returned to find a group of rats in the couch," Dembczyński recalls. "There was no time for poison. The woman needed to be able to live there. We had to shoot them. It took us about 3 hours."

It was a special case, because the law forbids shooting rats. Alternate methods include repellants and traps. "We use so-called restraining traps with lures. I'm afraid I can't share the specifics," says Tomasz Parlon. "Afterwards rats are drowned and disposed of. In our case – in a designated hole in a garbage dump."

INSE-TOX from Toruń transports rat carcasses to a recycling plant in Konin. They are kept frozen in special containers. They organize the transport when there is a sizable batch, on average every 2 months.

Desperate attack

There are legends about rats attacking by lunging for the people's throat. Media publicize stories which are shocking for the exterminators. On July 13th, a popular website e-Fakt published a story: "It happens for real! When it gets dark, rats enter the flat of Elzbieta Zawadzka (77 yo) on the ground floor of an apartment building at Księcia Witolda Street in Pszów (Silesia Province), and eat the Alzheimer-suffering woman alive. Her son is helpless. Every night, he lays on the mattress next to his sick mother's bed and watches. 'I'm afraid that one day they will eat her!', says the distraught son."

But the specialists have a very different opinion on the rodents' aggression. "In the postwar Poland there are only a couple of incidents involving people being bitten by rats," emphasizes Leszka. "Rats are very skittish creatures, they attack only in desperation, given no other option. Lunging for the throat – that's a fable; rats can jump to a maximum height of 70-80 cm.

Włodzimierz Dembczyński got scratched by a rat. "But that was in the beginning of my career. I didn't have enough experience," he explains. "I guarantee that even a mother with her young will try to escape when she sees a human. She will leave them and try to find an exit. If she doesn't find it, then it's possible she will bite. But that's very unlikely."

Jerzy Hammerling: "Disgusting? Rats are very nice and cute animals. I like everything about them, besides the tail. Not everyone knows it but rats are very clean creatures. It cleans itself almost all the time. And the fact that they live off of our trash is another story altogether."



Every one of us has a rat underground, sometimes even a several...



People complained about rats in this neighborhood. We need to check it.



Thanks to a camera like this we can monitor even very narrow spaces.

GOOD TO KNOW

Ratcatcher needed

- "Every one of us has a rat," the specialists say. In Poland, bigger cities the rat to people ratio is 1 to 1. There are also other estimates that measure it as 5 to 1, or even 10 to 1. Disinfection companies take care to keep the rat population from growing too large and going above ground.

- After getting a call from the client, the exterminators inspect the place for possible incursion points, then approximate the number of rodents from the number of droppings. They rinse the sewer pipes with clean water. They check integrity of the pipes with specialized cameras. Then they need to dig up the broken pipe and fix it. Next, the rats left outside need to be dealt with. Most commonly used methods are poison and traps.

- Rats are pests. They carry diseases and parasites, destroy plastic, corroded pipes and even concrete. Sinking pavement tiles around sewer entrances are signs of their presence.

- There will always be work for exterminators. Competition is very fierce. Companies compete for contracts from big housing associations and long-term contracts with production facilities.