

# Superstore management silent as a mouse

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By Rhiannon Coppin *News Reporter*

Mice rule the Real Canadian Superstore's aisles and no one — not former employees, not disgruntled customers, not even store management — wants to talk about it.

After reports in late April of mice scurrying across the floor in the middle of the day and of customers finding chewed-open food packages, Yukon Environmental Health Services got involved.

“My understanding of what was reported was that they did a mouse trapping,” said Lynn Richards, Manager of Yukon's Environmental Health Services.

“They did it themselves, and of course we followed up,” she said.

After hearing complaints of potentially mouse-tainted food being put back on the shelves, the Yukon News examined several of the store's dry goods aisles on May 31st and June 2nd.

Besides finding evidence of broken sugar and birdseed packages, there were mouse droppings in with the dogs' leashes, scattered between ready-made rice packets, and peppering the packaged pre-popped corn, bags of peanuts, tuna snacks and dog treats.

“The pet area is always an issue. Dog food is easy to get into,” said Richards.

Richards cites grains, birdseed, oats, rice, and baked goods as favourites of the ravenous rodent.

The mice also sometimes go for furniture.

A resident of Dawson City had a grotesque encounter after he purchased a folding camping chair on May 17.

His daughter took the chair out for the first time, and found the desiccated hairless bodies of three dead baby mice in the chewed-through webbing.

He was unable for days to get an explanation or an apology, but said he was told by Westfair Foods Ltd.'s headquarters in Calgary that the mice had either come with shipments from Vancouver, or that they were in the store because of the construction on the riverfront.

When his daughter returned the chair, no manager was available to meet with her.

Environmental Health Services received another mouse complaint the morning of June 1 and conducted a surprise inspection that day.

“We did see some evidence of mice infestation,” said Richards.

Mouse droppings are a public health hazard as they can transmit hantavirus, which can cause a severe pulmonary infection in humans resulting in death. Deer mice carrying the virus have been found in south and

central Yukon.

But it's a bacterium that has Environmental Health Services bothered.

"Salmonella is the disease of most concern in the setting that it's in," said Richards.

Superstore now has two weeks to clean up its act.

Store manager Fred Wilson would not comment on the inspection, the customer complaints or the plan for eradicating the mice and the salmonella risk they pose.

"It's not going to disappear overnight," said Westfair's Calgary-based spokesperson Lori Stene.

She confirmed that the store plans to conduct another round of trappings, though she didn't know of any additional measures the store might take.

"The health officer said that she was happy with the efforts that we've taken," Stene said.

Any food items that get chewed or that come into contact with mice droppings are thrown out, she said.

She also said that it was "highly unlikely" the droppings the Yukon News saw in the same locations both a day before and a day after the inspection were the same ones.

"I can tell you that they clean every day," she said.