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PUBLIC ENEMY

By **Corin Williams**

Graham Jukes, CIEH chief executive, has called for a single government department to take on responsibility for pest control, after reports of a dramatic rise in the UK's rat population.

The UK has seen a 15 per cent increase in the number of treatments undertaken by local authorities to combat rat infestations, according to figures released this month by the National Pest Technicians Association. The number of treatments for mice also rose by 6 per cent.

NPTA's survey of 344 councils found more than 378,000 treatments for brown rats carried out in 2007/08, and 147,000 for mice – a record total of recorded rodent infestations and the largest annual increase since 1999.

Mr Jukes warned that the public health risk from pest-borne diseases would rise if action was not taken. He said: 'In the UK, control of our most significant pests is loosening when it should be tightening. A single government department must have the ultimate responsibility for supervising monitoring programmes and implementing pest management measures.'

According to the NPTA the problem has been made worse by the growing number of

local authorities introducing charges for rodent control services. Many EHOs responding to the survey said that charging had made the public less likely to report infestations and more likely to try to tackle the problems themselves using ineffective treatments.

The association criticised a lack of effective co-operation in area rodent control between water companies, businesses and local authorities. It said that as pest control became the responsibility of individuals rather than society, rats were escaping pesticide treatments focused on isolated buildings.

Warmer winters, increased littering and fly-tipping have also been blamed for the rodent invasion, with the switch by many councils from weekly to fortnightly bin collections coming under fire. NPTA director Peter Crowden warned of an 'epidemic' unless there was a reduction in the amount of food waste.

He said: 'Fortnightly bin collections now mean it's vital we recycle. Just putting extra food scraps on compost heaps means fantastic breeding grounds for rats to spread disease.'

The NPTA's National Rodent Survey 2007/08 is available from their website.

→ www.npta.org.uk/assets/pages/rodent_report.html