

Burrowing Rodents' Destruction Of Public Grounds: Is The War Finally Over?

For hundreds of years, groundskeepers have been battling gophers and other burrowing pests with little to no success. Has the solution finally arrived?

It can be the most maddening problem a landscaper or groundskeeper can encounter. After long hours, weeks and months of work, not to mention thousands of dollars spent, to manicure lawns, carefully place and tend flowers, plants, and trees, it can all be completely upset by one little animal. Suddenly unsightly, dug-up mounds of earth are everywhere. Plants are being killed off. Holes and shallow tunnels are just waiting for someone to step in them and trip, or wreck a lawnmower, a golf cart, or other equipment. And the war is on.

For publicly-used facilities such as golf courses, school grounds, municipal parks, or even private landscapes, burrowing rodents quickly become intolerable. And it can become a problem of magnitude.

Jeff Benites, a Senior Park Maintenance Worker of Clark County Parks and Recreation who works at 182-acre Sunset Park in Las Vegas, Nevada, says the pocket-gopher problem there had spiraled far out of control. "Our landscaping was literally decorated with gopher-holes. Everywhere you looked, there was a gopher-hole somewhere. It had gotten to the point where kids would be playing little-league baseball and a gopher would pop up right underneath the batter."

These pests can also create enormous amounts of damage. "They've cost us millions over the life of this 40-plus-year old park," Benites says. "They chew through irrigation wires and high-voltage wires, and cause a lot of other problems."

Benites and others fighting this same fight may have finally found a truly effective method in a new burrowing rodent elimination system called the Rodenator.

The Rodenator Pro Pest Elimination System, is capable of delivering a precision underground shockwave to the targeted animals' tunnels and dens and collapses their tunnel systems to prevent re-infestation - without the use of chemicals or poisons, and the time-consuming tradition of baiting and trapping.

He says, "We're really getting control of them. In the areas we're targeting, we're noticing a huge decrease in the population."

This will come as great news to groundskeepers who have spent years battling burrowing pests such as moles, gophers and ground squirrels with varying levels of success.

Lefty Ayers, owner of Heritage Wildlife Management, a company specializing in the elimination of burrowing rodents, talks about the plethora of vain attempts he's heard about since being in business.

"People call me out of frustration and tell me, 'We've tried the garden hose, we've tried the hose from the exhaust out of the car, we've tried road flares...' I've even talked to people who have sat there with a .22 just waiting for the rodents to appear."

Ayers adds, "I even had one guy who had landscape people coming out once a week spending about two hours putting out gopher traps. He'd been doing this for years, and said they weren't even gaining on them."

On the use of traps, Jeff Benites agrees. "We used conventional traps for about 20 years, and never could catch up." In addition to their hit-or-miss success, traps in a publicly-used facility can be a hazard and must be used with caution.

At the park Benites says, "we'd have to set them first thing in the morning and go and pull them before the end of the shift so there would be no unattended traps. If we set them in a ball-field we'd have to completely lock up the field because of kids or someone pulling

out the trap and getting injured. So for liability reasons we'd have to pull them before the end of the shift."

Poisons are the most common solution in the last hundred years, and are becoming increasingly unusable due to environmental and regulatory issues, especially in public-used areas. They come in varying forms, the most common being baited food. Ironically, a major hazard comes about when the poison is effective—the dead rodent attracts other predators, who themselves will be poisoned.

This is clearly not desirable in an area such as a public park like Benites' which prides itself on a variety of wildlife. "We're a unique facility. We have around 182 acres, and we have coyote, quail, hawks, and all types of wildlife. We looked into bait pellets, but we didn't even bother trying them. Due to the problem of secondary poisoning, they were out of the question."

Also, when poison bait is *not* effective, animals who have ingested it will not touch it again. They instinctively associate the bait with a painful experience.

Poison can also take the form of gas. Over the years, a common gopher poison is Fumatoxin, placed underground. For the gas to be contained, the moisture content in the earth must be at a certain level and, if not, the gas escapes through cracks and not only does nothing to handle the gopher problem, it can be harmful to humans.

Fumatoxin contains aluminum phosphide, a dangerous Federal-Restricted-Use pesticide. Obviously, in a heavily-used area such as a park or a golf course, poisonous gasses are a health hazard to be avoided.

Ayers, also a recent adopter of the Rodenator system, says, "In talking with agencies such as public works departments, what I'm hearing over and over is that they cannot use and are having to completely get away from poisons. They're concerned about them getting

into the ground water and other hazards to the environment. They're really restricted on their use. They're really happy that our solution is poison-free."

But beyond all the risks involved, Ayers sees a common problem in conventional burrowing-rodent solutions. "Whether you're using a trap, or putting bait down for them to eat, you're depending on that animal to be a cooperative part of what you're trying to do. I like to tell people that with our method, we don't ask permission."

Ayers also says that other solutions such as poisons often depend on soil or flora content. "They're dependent on some other condition being present, and if it isn't just right, they won't work."

The Rodenator Pro is the only verified organic rodent control method targeting burrowing pests without poison, labor-intensive trapping and is it dependent on external conditions. A wand is inserted into a burrow hole, and a mixture of oxygen and propane gas is shot into the hole for sixty to ninety seconds, depending on the type of animal. Then another button on the wand is pressed, igniting a spark into the mixture, creating a precision underground shockwave. In one fell swoop, the animals are extinguished and the tunnel system local to the hole is collapsed.

How effective is this method? "I've had a very good success rate," says Ayers. "I did a recent job in a park for the City of Chino, CA. In one 6-hour day, I made 98 shots. I came back the next day and only found 7 active burrow systems from the day before. They're really happy. They had people getting injured in the ball park and in the fields and wanted to find something more successful than what they were doing."

In Las Vegas' Sunset Park, where despite all efforts gophers had never been brought under control, a major dent is finally being made after two months of use. "After the initial 1,000 shots, I may have had to revisit 4 or 5 holes," Benites says. "In another 10-acre area, we initially were doing 100 shots a day, and we're now down to 5 or 6."

Is it safe? Benites says, "our biggest concern was, would it be safe in a park setting? We've now launched over 3,000 shots and not had any complaints. We can use it during park business hours, with public being in the general area. We'll even have public people point out new holes to us, or report seeing a gopher to us."

Yes, after hundreds of years of battling these clever pests, the war may be finally over.

For more info, call 877-RODENATOR; fax 208-355-0103; visit www.rodenator.com; email sales@rodenator.com; or write to Meyer Industries at PO Box 39, Midvale, ID 83645.