



LOWELL PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Henry J. Mroz Administration Office
155 Merrimack Street
Lowell, Massachusetts 01852

Rick Underwood
Director of Operations & Maintenance

Tel: (978) 674-2016
Fax: (978) 275-6361
E-Mail: runderwood@lowell.k12.ma.us

To: Lowell City Council

From: Rick Underwood, Director of Operations and Maintenance

Re: Pest Control Report – Motion by Councilor Leahy - Req. City Mgr. Provide Update
Regarding Pest Control In The Lowell Public Schools

Over the past few years the School Department and the City of Lowell's D.P.W. have taken many steps to help combat the increase in pest control problems that we've been experiencing.

The changes initially began in 2017/2018 after numerous complaints by parents, staff and students on several different topics. These complaints were of leaking roofs, poor heating and cooling systems, an infestation of mice, amongst other legitimate concerns. Attached to these complaints were several pictures of mice in classrooms, on desks and mice droppings. In light of these pictures and the fact that we just began a new Eat and Go program (breakfast in the classroom), we would be introducing food to every corner of the building, in every school and would only increase the problem with mice and ants.

Understanding the new program would generate more revenue through the food service account, it would also allow us to spend more money on pest control. I had a conversation with former Chief of Finance, Gary Frisch, about the recent complaints regarding the uptick in mice sightings and my thoughts on spending more money on pest control with the use of the increased revenue. Gary agreed and a plan was made to put the pest control contract out for bid at double the existing service and possibly cost. Despite rumors, we did not let the previous vendor go or fire them, we simply did what the law requires us to do - we hired the lowest bidder who was qualified to perform the job. (Banner pest control has been in business for 30 years)

The Lowell School Department's approach to pest control is an ever changing plan and will continue to be one until we can get it under control.

Some of the things we have done on top of doubling the service contract and schedule:

- Food Service Director, Sharon Lagasse and I attended a meeting with all Cook Managers and Senior Custodians. We went over the following:
 - How and to whom pest control sightings should be reported

- Where the reporting book should be left for easy viewing when the vendor comes
- How food should be stored overnight. (Thousands of dollars were spent on large plastic containers to store food when it's not being served.)
- We asked Custodians to work with Cook Managers and staff to do a thorough cleaning of kitchens and storage areas that may need a little more muscle than normal. (Such as moving kitchen equipment and storage shelves loaded with boxes; vacuuming corners; cleaning behind the heavy items.) We ask that they do this several time throughout the year.

D.P.W. Lands and Buildings have also helped combat this problem by going to schools with the help of custodial staff to identify and close any openings found in the school that a mouse can enter. Additionally, they added door sweeps to doors with gaps on the bottom and sealed gaps around pipes.

Now we need to get the UTL members in on the fight!!!

The same people making the complaints are a big part of the problem. I have been visiting schools recently specifically looking around for what attracts mice in the classrooms, FOOD! I won't start naming schools, teachers or room numbers but I can say this, I've been to hundreds of rooms and found food in teachers desk draws, on classroom floors from breakfast left until they are cleaned at night, personal microwaves full of food crumbs, donuts and snacks left in the teacher's room overnight, bags of popcorn on a high shelf that looked like it had been there for some time and so many other food items I could never list them all.

I had one teacher ask me what I was doing when she noticed me taking pictures of a pack of graham crackers on a table in her room. When I explained to her what I was doing and why, her reply was that they're still in the wrapped package. It is scenarios such as this that hinder our ability to solve the problem.

Before this department considers spending more tax dollars or making other changes to an already set plan, we need to be sure we are all doing what we can to prevent the issue.

Thanks,
 Rick Underwood
 Director of Operations and Maintenance
 Lowell Public Schools