

# Rats Making National Policies

**R**ATS have become national policymakers. Most citizens might not have a rat on their premises, but our lives are affected daily by how rats act and react.

Ingredients or additives in the food we eat might be condemned or banned by federal agencies if rats eating them in laboratories display symptoms of malignancy.

Factories might be directed by government bureaus to change their operations if laboratory rats show undesirable reactions to smoke, residues or other elements of production.

Medical treatments often are tested on rats and policies determined regarding their use on humans.

Congress has been accused of pouring billions of dollars down various "rat holes" to carry out national policies, but this is figurative, since it is not necessarily intended that four-footed rodents would share in treasury benefits.

Scientific American magazine has published a report of studies on

rat colonies set up at Rutgers University by Richard Lore and Kevin Flannelly that offers considerable information.

They report that the genus "rattus" is remarkably large, with more than 400 species. Most common in worldwide distribution is "rattus norvegicus," the Norway or brown rat. No estimate is given of total rat numbers, but it must be huge.

Brown rats thrive on all continents inhabited by man, the scientists say, and consume anything and everything that human beings eat. They also have a comparatively high birth rate.

In addition to use of rats to guide physical policies for people, Lore and Flannelly point out that psychologists and biologists have worked with "rattus norvegicus" in laboratories to study behavioral and environmental characteristics.

They add that "most workers interested in social behavior chose to work with primates because the social behavior of rats was consid-

ered to be primitive and uninteresting, with commonest response of one rat to another being a vicious attack."

Lore and Flannelly said that, "in its conflict with man, rattus norvegicus has developed admirably efficient strategies" to avoid poisoned baits. If feeding animals get sick, the new food is thereafter avoided by the entire colony.

Rats seem to be ahead of human beings in this respect. People will go right on eating and drinking stuff that has made large numbers of others seriously ill, obese, incapacitated or disoriented. Education, warnings and laws won't stop them.

Scientists may prefer to work with rats because they are cheaper to board than human subjects.

However, most of us like to think there are basic differences between humans and rats and hope that even new genetic research projects will not alter them. We may have too many people policies already that are determined by rats!