

Walk around enough homes in San Diego County and you start to notice a pattern. The houses with recurring rodent trouble underneath are rarely the ones with one dramatic hole you can spot from the sidewalk. More often, it is a collection of overlooked weaknesses at ground level, around the foundation, near vents, or anywhere a repair was delayed just long enough for rodents to turn it into a route.

That matters because what gets under a house does not stay neatly contained under a house. In crawl spaces and other subfloor areas, droppings, urine, and nesting materials can contaminate dust, and that dust can affect the air inside the living space. Once rodents establish regular travel paths, the problem becomes less about a single sighting and more about ongoing access. That is where rodent proofing earns its keep.

In San Diego, effective control is usually a mix of sanitation, structural exclusion, and population control. Structural exclusion sounds technical, but in plain terms it means finding how rodents are getting in and closing those routes with materials they cannot easily chew through or push aside. The challenge is that homeowners often look for activity first and openings second, when the better sequence is the other way around.

Why the underside of a home is so attractive

Under a home, rodents find cover, darkness, and relative protection from daily disturbance. A crawl space or foundation perimeter may not look inviting to us, but it offers exactly what a pest animal wants, a concealed travel zone close to the structure. Once an animal can move there undisturbed, it has time to explore vents, gaps, and utility areas and turn a small defect into a reliable point of entry.

In Southern California, this issue is not just seasonal. Homes remain vulnerable whenever those openings are left unsealed. That is especially true in inland parts of the county, where year-round activity means an old gap does not stop being relevant because summer ended or the weather shifted.

Neighborhood setting matters too. Homes near canyons and creeks tend to face more pressure because those areas act as travel corridors and habitat. Rodents move along landscape features and structural routes toward homes. If you live near a canyon edge or a brushy drainage, the home may sit right where natural movement and man-made shelter intersect.

The most common ground-level entry points

Most of the trouble under San Diego homes starts with one of a few familiar conditions. These are not exotic failures. They are basic building components that loosen, rust, crack, or get damaged over time.

- damaged or missing foundation vent screens
- gaps around the foundation or crawl-space perimeter
- openings created during repairs or remodeling that were never fully sealed
- weak screening or covers at lower vent openings
- neglected exterior areas where overgrowth hides access points

Foundation vents deserve special attention because they are supposed to allow airflow while still keeping pests out. When the screen is torn, missing, loose at one corner, or replaced with a material that is too flimsy, it stops being a barrier. I have seen many homeowners focus on the attic because they heard scratching overhead, while the real access point was a damaged vent down low that had been ignored for years.

Gaps around the foundation are another repeat offender. These are not always obvious voids. Sometimes they are irregular separations where different materials meet, or places where a prior patch failed. Sometimes the opening is partly hidden by mulch, soil, stored items, or dense landscaping. A home can look tidy from the curb and still have several vulnerable spots hugging the foundation line.

Lower vent openings matter for the same reason. Any screened opening is only as strong as [rodent proofing](#) its attachment and material. San Diego County guidance points to rodent-resistant repairs using quarter-inch hardware cloth in an 18 to 22 gauge range. That is a useful benchmark because it recognizes a simple truth from field work, the right material matters just as much as the idea of sealing.

The vent problem homeowners underestimate

Vents are deceptive. They look finished. They look intentional. That makes people assume they are secure. But rodents do not care that a vent belongs there. They care whether it is protected well enough to stop entry.

A vent can fail in several ways without attracting much attention. The mesh may corrode. A fastener may work loose. A corner may bend outward. A screen may get replaced with a lighter material that is easier to damage. Even a small compromise can change a vent from a protective feature into a doorway.

This is one reason professional exclusion work tends to start with a slow, methodical perimeter inspection instead of a quick glance. The underside of a house rarely announces the problem. You have to crouch, look at attachment points, check edges, and view the opening from angles that reveal separation. I have watched homeowners stare directly at a vent and miss the fact that the screen had detached along one side because the defect blended into shadow.

UC guidance specifically highlights sealing gaps and repairing vent screens around foundations, roofs, attics, and under eaves. That tells you something important. Rodent access is often a systems problem, not a single-location problem. If a vent is weak at the foundation and eaves are also open, the structure offers multiple ways in and multiple routes through.

Not every rodent under a house came in from underneath

This catches people off guard. In San Diego, roof rats are especially relevant, and they are climbers. They commonly enter through roof-related openings and eaves. So while the title here focuses on getting under homes, it is worth remembering that some rodent activity below the living space may start with access higher up on the structure.

A roof rat can exploit openings near the roofline, move into a wall or other concealed structural path, and eventually show up in areas the homeowner associates with the underside of the home. That is why a narrow focus on the crawl space can leave part of the problem untouched. If roof-related openings are left open, you may repair a lower defect and still wonder why signs of activity continue.

This is also where landscaping [read more](#) comes into the picture. San Diego County advises trimming trees and bushes at least four feet away from the roof to reduce roof-rat access. That is practical guidance, not cosmetic advice. A branch that touches or nearly touches the structure can function like a bridge. In neighborhoods near canyon edges or mature landscaping, this step often makes a meaningful difference because it disrupts easy travel to the upper parts of the home.

Eaves, roof edges, and the overlap between upper and lower access

Under eaves is not the first place most people think of when they are worrying about the space under the house. Still, it belongs in the conversation because rodent movement through a structure rarely respects the categories homeowners use.

If openings around eaves or roof edges remain unsealed, a climbing species can get inside and begin using hidden routes throughout the building. Once that happens, the signs may show up in more than one zone, attic noises at night, contamination in insulation, or activity in lower concealed spaces. The home feels like it has several separate problems, when in reality it has one connected access network.

That is why rodent proofing works best when it treats the house as a full exterior shell. Foundation vents, roof openings, attic vents, and eaves all belong on the same checklist even if the first evidence appears under the home.

What makes some San Diego homes more vulnerable than others

There is no single house type that guarantees trouble, but some conditions raise the odds.

Homes close to canyons or creeks often experience more rodent pressure because those natural areas provide cover and movement corridors. Houses with mature landscaping that reaches the structure, especially near the roof, create easier travel routes. Properties where old vent screens were never upgraded, or where small structural repairs accumulated over time, also tend to have more repeat activity.

One detail I have seen matter again and again is visibility. If a section of the foundation is hidden behind stored materials, thick shrubs, or neglected side-yard growth, small failures go unnoticed longer. Rodents benefit from the same thing. A concealed opening is easier for them to use repeatedly and harder for the owner to catch early.

That does not mean tidy homes are immune. It means hidden conditions usually last longer, and long-lasting conditions become established access points.



How to inspect without fooling yourself

A lot of homeowners do a sincere inspection and still miss the real problem because they inspect at standing height, in broad daylight, from the most convenient path. Rodent entry points under homes are often low, shaded, partially obstructed, or visually subtle.

The best inspection is slow and specific. Look closely at every foundation vent and every lower screened opening. Check whether the screen is intact, firmly attached, and made from a rodent-resistant material. Look along the foundation perimeter for separations, failed patch areas, or places where a gap is hidden by debris or plant growth. Then widen the view and check above, because if roof rats are involved, roof edges, eaves, and roof-access vegetation may be part of the same story.

If there has already been contamination under the house, resist the urge to sweep up droppings so you can “see better.” That kind of cleanup shortcut creates a real health risk.

If you find droppings, cleanup comes second to safety

This is one of the most important judgment calls in the whole process. People see droppings under a house and want to dry sweep, vacuum, or blow the area out so they can inspect it. That is exactly what public health guidance says not to do.

Rodent droppings, urine, and nesting materials can contain disease-causing particles. Sweeping or vacuuming them can aerosolize those particles, which means you may breathe in contamination you would have been better off leaving undisturbed until you were ready to handle it correctly. Proper cleanup involves wetting or disinfecting contaminated areas, using gloves, removing waste with damp materials, and placing waste into sealed bags.

A short safety routine helps keep that process grounded:

- do not sweep or vacuum droppings, urine, or nesting materials
- wear gloves before handling contaminated material
- wet or disinfect the area first so debris is not disturbed dry
- use damp materials for removal
- bag the waste in sealed bags

That sequence is easy to overlook when you are frustrated and trying to fix the house quickly, but it is the right call. I have seen people spend hours chasing entry points while treating contamination like ordinary dust. It is not ordinary dust.

The repair materials matter more than many people think

When homeowners hear “seal the opening,” they sometimes picture any screen, mesh, or patch that appears to cover the space. For rodent proofing, appearance is not enough. The repair needs to resist chewing, pushing, and repeated pressure over time.

San Diego County’s guidance is specific for a reason. Rodent-proof repairs should use rodent-resistant materials such as quarter-inch hardware cloth in an 18 to 22 gauge range. That recommendation gives you a practical standard. It does not just say “screen it.” It points to a screen type and strength that is meant for exclusion, not for looks.

This is where a lot of well-meant DIY fixes fall short. A patch can seem solid on installation day and fail quietly later. Or it can be secured well in the center but weak around the perimeter, which is exactly where a determined animal tests it. Even good material can underperform if the edges are not properly repaired and attached.

Why repeat infestations happen after “treatment”

A common pattern goes like this. A homeowner hears activity, addresses the animals they know about, and gets temporary relief. Then a few weeks or months later, the problem returns. The reason is often simple. Population control happened, but the structure stayed open.

That is why the best results in Southern California usually come from combining sanitation, structural exclusion, and population control instead of relying on one piece alone. If openings remain at the foundation, vents, roofline, or eaves, the house continues to advertise availability. New rodents do not need a standing invitation. They just need a route.

This is particularly important in areas where rodent pressure is ongoing because nearby habitat remains active year-round. A house does not become protected because it was quiet for one month. It becomes protected when access points are found, repaired with the right materials, and checked again before small defects become large ones.

A practical way to think about long-term rodent proofing

The homeowners who stay ahead of this are usually not doing anything dramatic. They are simply consistent. They understand that rodent proofing is not a one-time event, especially in neighborhoods with canyon influence, mature landscaping, or older exterior features.

Think of the home in layers. The lowest layer includes foundation gaps and vent screens. The upper layer includes roof openings, attic vents, and eaves. The landscape layer includes tree and shrub contact with the structure. If any one layer is neglected, the others have to work harder.

That broader view also keeps you from misdiagnosing the problem. If the crawl space shows signs of activity, inspect there carefully, but do not stop there. If the attic has evidence, inspect the foundation too. Rodents use routes, and routes overlap.

A well-sealed home does not depend on luck. It depends on small, durable repairs made in the right places, with the right materials, and supported by the simple habits that reduce access over time. For San Diego homes, especially those near natural corridors or with aging vent screens, that is the difference between a recurring hassle and a structure that finally stops giving rodents an easy way under it.