



Rats. I Have Mice.

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People will store birdseed in their garage, often in the original bag. The mice thank them for that, then hunt down a safe place to stash the seed and build nests. What's right at hand? The car. When you need to repair the damage, your technicians are exposed to the mouse droppings. You won't get rabies from mice. But you can get Hantavirus and other diseases from the droppings. Even the nesting material can be a hazard, because it could have mites or fleas in it.

A customer brings in a mousy car. Do you:

- a. Hold your nose, grab the air blow gun, and blow that sucker away?
- b. Put the car in the wash bay, turn on the pressure washer, and blast?
- c. Put on rubber or nitrile gloves, grab the disinfectant, and soak the bejabbers out of that stuff?

The correct answer: C. If you blow all that nesting material, birdseed and detritus around, whether with air or with water, you're putting it in the air, breathing it in, and forcing your coworkers to breathe it in, too. And you're not eliminating it from the car; you're just moving it to other parts of the car.

Could you vacuum it up? Not with an ordinary shop vacuum. Those won't capture the very small particles, but will just spread those around. If you have a HEPA vacuum, you could use that. Don't try using a power washer on it – the force of the spray will aerosolize the particles, spreading them around nearly as effectively as the vacuum would.

What should you do?

1. Let it air out, if you can. If the mouse nest is in the engine compartment, open the hood. That's most effective if you can do it outdoors, in sunlight (sunlight is a pretty good disinfectant). You still need to clean up the mess, but it will be less of a hazard once it's been exposed to air and sunlight.
2. Wear waterproof gloves when cleaning up. Nitrile, rubber, latex, or vinyl gloves will work well. You're working with a strong eye irritant, so safety glasses are mandatory (or better yet, wear chemical safety goggles or a face shield designed to protect against splashing).
3. Disinfect. Spray the area thoroughly with a commercial disinfectant (such as Lysol®). You can also use a bleach solution, made by mixing 1 ½ cups of household bleach in a gallon of water (a 1:10 solution). Don't make this up in advance, as bleach loses its potency if it sits around.
4. Soft surfaces such as air filters are best disposed of. The carpet can be shampooed or steam-cleaned. You still want to disinfect the materials that you're throwing away, because that reduces the downstream hazard.
5. If you used bleach, wait five minutes. If you used a commercial disinfectant, read the label. It will tell you how much contact time is required to be effective. Usually, it's about two minutes.

6. After you've soaked contaminated air filters and other expendable materials with disinfectant, remove them, put them in plastic bags, and put them in the trash.
7. Wipe down the areas with paper towels, after waiting the designated time for the disinfectant to work. Put the paper towels in a plastic bag for disposal.
8. Remove your gloves, putting them in the plastic bag.
9. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

And last of all, suggest that the car owner find a better way to store the birdseed – such as in a metal container.

This article is intended to provide general information (no advice) about current safety topics. To discuss your specific concerns and how CHESS may help, please contact CHESS at 651-481-9787 or chess@chess-safety.com

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