

# Harlem construction site is fueling massive rat outbreak

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At 5 p.m. on West 128th Street in Harlem, the rats are already out, and some days it feels like a test of faith.

“I would describe it as biblical. It’s epic. It’s unbelievable,” resident Elizabeth Mehling said.

“Before, you’d be like, ‘OK, it’s about to get dark.’ Nope. They come out in the daytime,” resident Lisa Evans said.

## What You Need To Know

- Residents on West 128th Street in Harlem say their rat problem has reached “biblical” levels
- City inspection records confirm repeated rat activity at 68 and 70 West 128th Street, two properties are tied to developer Shalom Malul and landlord Steve Croman
- The Department of Sanitation says it issued more than 50 summonses this year for uncovered bins and dirty sidewalks and will keep monitoring the block
- The surge comes shortly after the city’s “rat czar” stepped down last month following reports that rat complaints have dropped for 10 months in a row

What used to be a nighttime nuisance, it now crawls through daylight. It’s a problem neighbors trace back to a construction site.

“Then rats started just breeding,” resident Ezra Edghill said.

When garbage goes out, rats follow, turning the sidewalk into something families avoid.

“Some days I’ll walk to school and I’ll just, like, walk on a completely different block,” neighbor Lucy Lamb said.

City inspection records confirm repeated rat activity at 68 and 70 West 128th Street. The properties are tied to developer Shalom Malul and landlord Steve Croman.

“The mayor did hire somebody that I was supposed to be — a rat inspector or killer. Like, I don’t know where they are,” neighbor Octavia Dunkin said.

The city's "rat czar" **stepped down** last month as officials say rat complaints have dropped for 10 months in a row.

The Department of Sanitation says its issued more than 50 summonses this year for uncovered bins and dirty sidewalks and will keep monitoring the block.

But people here argue fines alone won't deliver them from this infestation.

"Harlem is awesome, but we need some help here with these abandoned lots. Make these landlords accountable," neighbor Chelsea Silvernell said.

NY1 reached out to both landlords but has not heard back. The city's Health Department, however, released a statement saying they are "aware" of the property and will "continue to address the conditions, following our enforcement process."

"We are also communicating directly with the property owners and sharing evidence-based approaches to reducing rats to support their compliance," the statement continued.