At home or in the office, in the workshop, warehouse or factory, we all look straight in front of our noses. If we glance down, the floor’s so polished that – as Mom used to say – you could eat off it. And if we ever check it out, there’s a nice clean ceiling in plain sight.

But on the other side – inside that ceiling space – all too often it’s quite another story. Take a hospital: all visible surfaces are scrubbed and shined. No germ dare lurk on the walls and floors of the operating theatres or the wards. And yet, on the other side of the partitioning there can be pigeons, bats, rats and mice (dead or alive), fungal growth, dirt, dust and debris by the bucket-load. The effect on air quality – and therefore health – can be horrendous. But, because the root cause remains unseen, it’s all too often ignored. Out of sight, out of mind.

Sick Building Syndrome knocks productivity. There can be many causes, but one of the easiest to deal with decisively is the detritus of decaying insulation, animal remains, and airborne muck that’s found a free home.

That’s where the Roof Rats come in. Their motto: “We clean where others fear to tread!”

First established in Gauteng and now also operating in Natal and the Western Cape, Roof Rats was the brainchild of ‘King Rat’ Diederik van ‘t Hof, who took ceiling clearance from what had been a casual hit-and-miss affair and transformed it into a fine art.

Roof Rats’ specialist teams use only professional, industrial vacuum cleaners that far surpass SABS requirements. These operate to the so-called HEPA standard, referring to High Efficiency Particulate Air filters that must trap at the very least, 99.97% of all airborne contaminants down to a minuscule size of just 0.3 micrometers.

Roof Rats teams bring in their own ladders, cables, lights, fire extinguishers and personal safety equipment. Where necessary they move insulation material to clean underneath – then they scrub the insulation itself before replacing it.
Finally, the team takes away the mess they’ve sucked out of the roof area. How much might that be? Take just one day’s work on one residential site: the debris to be carted off totalled 19.5kg of dust and droppings, plus ten bags of assorted rubbish that included 9.4kg of bird droppings from one roost and another 12.5kg of nesting material… from just one nest!

Now consider a commercial site, such as one tackled recently in Illowo, northern Johannesburg. Uninvited guests included a large bat colony living in the roof: the eviction process involved removing the roof sheeting, cleaning the ceiling boards, installing a wire mesh and expander foam mix into all the cavities that the bats had colonised, as well as their access points, before finally replacing the roof sheeting and ensuring that all was once again waterproof and clean.

Result: a healthier environment. With a bonus: it’s also more attractive to potential tenants and prospective purchasers.

Roof Rats has recently won the Sage 702 Talk Radio Small Business Awards.

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