The scourge of mankind

Ted Brown

I hate rats. Okay, I know they are part of the food chain and probably have a benefit somewhere. But I still hate 'em.

They've been the scourge of mankind from day one, carrying plague and disease throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, infesting the trenches in the First World War and now they play havoc in the slums of big cities around the world.

They are pretty much a certainty in any barn— which is where I'm going with this.

My barn takes a significant number of animals to generate the enough body heat to keep the water pipes from freezing.

Being proactive, I installed heat straps on all the water pipes in the barn, from the heated enclosure of the water pump, to the far end of the barn. They've worked like a charm. The last thing I want to find is a frozen pipe. The animals are thirsty and I'm pretty sure I'll be late for work.

And also being safety conscious, I installed Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) receptacles, like those found in your bathroom, so I don't electrocute a sheep if a water bowl happens to overflow.

Three weeks ago, I noticed one GFCI receptacle was tripped, so I investigated to see what was the problem. I reset it, and plugged in the heat strap— snap, off it went.

I checked all the connections and found no reason, so I tried again. It stayed on. I figured it had to be a fluke of some sort as that GFCI remained on.

Fast forward to New Year's Eve.

After doing the chores, I decided to set up the heater in the water pump enclosure, just in case it turned cold. (I bought a new heater this year as the old one had the insulation chewed off the power cord— yup, you guessed it, rats.)

I set it up and swept out the area under the pump. Looking down, I saw where one heat strap entered the enclosure, and knew why the GFCI tripped earlier.

Seems rats had chewed three feet of heat strap, to the point where it shorted out. I then found a second heat strap was also ruined by rats.

I guess when I was resetting the GFCI, the rat chewing on that cable was getting a tingle as I flipped the reset on and off.

Total damage was $160 for heat straps, not to mention the time and effort to re-install them.

So, I hate rats, plain and simple. I've contemplated how to deal with future 'freezing' problems. Seems I have two options: I can add more cats to kill the rats, or add more sheep to heat the barn.

I think I'll just add more sheep.

With The Sidekick around, the cats are *waaay* too well fed to hunt rats.

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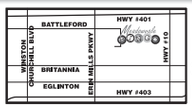

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