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operationslog: PEST CONTROL

Best Pest Control Methods

Today's pest management involves less pesticide usage, especially in commercial facilities where occupants work on a daily basis

By Jordan Fox
Email the CP editors

Many building service contractors offer additional services as ways to impact their bottom lines. Expanding their cleaning services to other related service areas such as pest management, they say, can be a smart business maneuver.

"Pest control add-ons can be successful because the need for environmentally-friendly pest control is so great," says Curtis McLemore, CEO of McLemore Building Maintenance Inc., Houston. "Rats and mice, along with termites and other wood boring insects can cause vast amounts of structural damage. And cockroaches and rodents are an obvious threat to public health. Cockroaches have been implicated in causing asthma, for example."

Today's pest control

In recent years, consumers throughout the country have made it clear in that they want a safer, more effective pest management methodology and at the same time want to protect the environment. The pest management industry listened and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) resulted.

Urban IPM primarily involves careful inspection, sanitation efforts, pest proofing, monitoring, mechanical treatments and/or pesticide applications, only if necessary, says Jerry Batzner, president, Batzner Pest Management, New Berlin, Wis.

"A quick fix with a pesticide application is to be avoided. But there are some cases where it makes good sense to use a chemical first, followed by any of the various non-chemical strategies and structural improvements," he adds.

Today's pest management involves less pesticide usage, especially in commercial facilities where occupants work on a daily basis.

Cockroaches and termites

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No facility manager or building occupant likes to see insects crawling around inside their buildings. Cockroaches can contaminate food with the pathogens they carry, causing allergies, food poisoning, dysentery and other serious diseases. In order to control them, it's important to know which species are present and where they are lurking, says Batzner.

"Modern bait formulations allow highly targeted applications close to the cockroach population. The very small amount of active ingredient in the bait can achieve extraordinary results," he adds.

Termite infestations are serious too, demonstrated by the fact that they chew away year-round at structures all over the country. They invade the homes and businesses of millions of Americans every year at a cost of more than \$2.5 billion in structural damage, according to the National Pest Management Association.

To control termites, experts advise establishing a continuous chemical barrier between the soil where subterranean termites live, and the wood in a building. Repellent termiticides create a barrier that repels termites away from perceived food sources, but many are still able to slip through cracks in the barrier. On the other hand, when termites come into contact with non-repellent products, they either ingest it and die, or tunnel into the treated soil and later pass along the poison when they come into contact with other termites, killing even greater numbers.


Rodents, birds and bats

Mice and rats are among the most troublesome pests in the world. They contaminate millions of dollars worth of food, damage property and cause electrical fires with their constant gnawing. Applying baits and traps after careful inspection and monitoring of rodent activity yields the most successful results. Today's rodent products have a low toxicity, so there is little or no non-target environmental impact, says Batzner.

While rodents cause problems inside a building, owls, pigeons, geese and other birds can be a nuisance outside. But, bird control is a sensitive issue. BSCs can't simply eliminate birds like they do rodents or cockroaches. Instead, birds need to be relocated by placing nets or spikes to keep birds from roosting. Another technique is to trap them and relocate them to another area.

Birds can be especially problematic because people can contract diseases from bird droppings. BSCs need to remove droppings immediately and sterilize the affected areas.

Bats cause similar problems as birds. Experts recommend putting up bat houses to catch them and then relocate them to another area.

Effectively applying today's baits, traps and pesticides will solve most pest infestation problems. But it's important to use the safest control strategies and materials to get the job done. BSCs looking to add pest control to their repertoire of services are advised to keep that in mind, even if they decide to use a subcontractor for the job. 

SUBCONTRACTING SERVICES

For many building service contractors, rather than running multiple divisions in-house, it may be easier to remain focused on cleaning and subcontract additional services, such as pest control. The client benefits from receiving quality cleaning and pest management while still only billing one vendor.

"Adding [pest control] as a service came about when a client of ours requested a bundled service package," says Jim Simmonds, vice president, FBG Service Corp., Omaha, Neb. "[However], we knew we wanted a subcontractor rather than do it in-house because it wasn't our core business."

Incorporating pest-control services into in-house operations can be a slow and difficult road. Getting licensed and authorized requires training and education of employees, and can be a costly and time consuming process, says Simmonds.

"We learned about the regulatory hurdles and licensing requirements for providing those services and didn't want to get involved in that, so it made sense for us to find a company specializing in pest control to serve as a subcontractor," adds Curtis McLemore, CEO of McLemore Building Maintenance Inc., Houston.

In addition, pest control, like janitorial, is a business that has low profit margins. Contractors will need a lot of volume to support it and be proactive in marketing the service, says Simmonds.

Jordan Fox is a Milwaukee-based freelancer.

