



[Fly Control Issue] Serve Up Small Fly Control

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They hover over wine glasses, then dive into the sweet nectar inside for a taste. They congregate by beer taps, swarm near sliced fruit prepared as cocktail garnish. They're bar regulars — usual suspects in any situation where there's food, water, damp crevices, mucky organic matter and drain sludge. They hang out in restaurants, corporate cafeterias, hospital facilities, in most commercial buildings, really. Pest management professionals will even find these characters in seemingly clean establishments. "Customers don't usually see the breeding grounds for small flies, but when you point the problem out to them their response often is, 'Yuck,'" says Ted Snyder, technical director, Batzner Pest Management, Milwaukee, Wis.

OPPORTUNITIES AWAIT. Small flies are bad for business. (Would you want a wine-loving fly joining your table for dinner?) But they spell opportunity for pest control companies that can properly identify and treat the problem.

Rose Pest Solutions in Troy, Mich., added small fly control to its repertoire five years ago. "It was a market opportunity," says Mark Sheperdigian, technical director. "You keep your eye out for small flies. You use them to introduce your service to a potential account. If you go out to eat and see small flies, you tell the manager, 'You know, you don't have to live with those.'"

As business for pest services such as termite and flea control has declined in recent years, observant pest control operators (PCOs) seeking fresh bait are taking these small flies more seriously. Sheperdigian said the decline of the German cockroach freed up time at his company to branch out into "other things."

"This is other things," he says of small fly control, emphasizing a program centered on identification, sanitation, control and education.

FINE-TUNING THE INSPECTION. Sanitation issues are the crux of a small fly problem. Common small flies like small fruit flies, phorids and fungus gnats nest in organic material that builds up unbeknownst to clients. Fruit flies can go from egg to mature adult in fewer than eight days. An infestation can advance before an account recognizes there is a problem.

"They're not like house flies that breed outside and fly inside," says Cisse Spragins, CEO, Rockwell Labs Ltd, North Kansas City, Mo. Spragins developed a treatment protocol for small flies after recognizing the market opportunity seven years ago when she noticed outbreaks in certain regions, particularly the Northeast. In the last few years, small fly problems have spread everywhere, she says.

"These flies breed in scum buildup or organic matter that is inside the account," Spragins continues. "They are opportunistic about where they breed."

Most have good sanitary intentions. But consider the power-washing technique many restaurants employ to "sterilize" their kitchens. All that warm water forces food matter off of surfaces and foot-traffic areas, and into tile cracks and who knows where else. Peeling caulk, plumbing leaks, standing water, these are all supple small fly breeding grounds.

Facilities that are not food service-oriented are equally exposed to the problem. Bob Heiney, national marketing manager for B&G Equipment, Jackson, Ga., recalls a hospital account that struggled with moth flies. "There was a hose leaking into a wall void," says Heiney. "When we showed the executive director that the wall void was full of maggots, they shut down that section of the facility and we fixed it."

All of those places in a commercial facility you can't see — even underneath floor slabs and behind walls — are attractive real estate for small fly breeding. "There are micro-environments that no one thinks about," Snyder adds, noting that different flies are attracted to various stages of decaying matter. Basically, there's new muck and old muck. Small flies generally get their pick of the muck buffet. (Remember, all this muck happens in visibly clean facilities, too. PCOs must really focus on identification, Snyder added.)

"Small fruit flies are attracted to vinegar odors and early stages of decay," Snyder says. "Black fruit flies prefer matter that established yeast growth, so it's more decayed. Moth flies and phorids tend toward higher decay. Under a bar, you can have 'stuff' at multiple levels of decay."

IMPLEMENTING A PROGRAM. Identification is the key to any pest program, and small flies are no different. Training service technicians to properly identify small flies and particular species lays the groundwork for the control game plan. As noted, development sites and control methods differ for various small flies.

"To control small flies, you need a strong hand lens or a microscope and a good field guide," Sheperdigian says.

Small fly programs include bioremediation, sanitation, mature fly control (traps, lights) and education. Used in concert, these methods will eliminate the existing fly population, remove breeding areas and prevent small fly development.

The challenge with controlling small flies is that there is no real insecticide to kill off the pests, and even then they develop a resistance, Snyder says. Customers are generally uneducated about small fly prevention, explaining why many food establishments power wash kitchens and unknowingly spark an infestation. Finally, customer cooperation in addressing sanitation issues is helpful to prevent small flies from returning to treated breeding areas.

"Small flies become such a problem because people don't necessarily realize the role of sanitation in creating small fly issues," Snyder adds, noting that a single sink overflow can create a happy breeding ground in no time.

IT STARTS WITH EDUCATION. Education is the most important small fly control tool, Sheperdigian says. And complete customer cooperation is not necessary to implement an effective program. "We can do small fly work the same way we used to do cockroach work, even if clients don't help [with sanitation]," he says.

KEEP IT CLEAN. Cleaning up breeding zones is the key to controlling small flies. That's why Assured Environments in New York City rolled its small fly control service into its drain and detail cleaning division. The company uses low-pressure steam machines that heat up to 260°F to kill off flies. "We clean all the stainless steel equipment in the area, getting rid of organic matter and food buildup," says Andrew Feldstein, vice president operations, Assured Environments. The same steam treatment is used in drains, followed by a degreaser that contains citrus oil, which removes odor.

Additionally, the company offers a bioremediation product that eats away organic matter. The drain cleaning service is priced on a per-drain basis, with a minimum service call fee. Bioremediation involves an initial setup charge, plus a monthly charge for monthly cartridge changes. The total detail cleaning service is priced based on labor and materials.

Insect and light traps are used to control mature flies, and Vector units are often incorporated into the small fly control program, Feldstein says. "Those are a short-term quick fix for fruit flies," he says, which is important for restaurateurs fielding customer complaints of flies.

At Rose Pest Solutions, Sheperdigian's program is also anchored in finding and removing breeding sites. He may use insect growth regulators to control and carefully treat adult resting sites according to label. He relies on a compressed air sprayer to target substances. This regimen is sometimes helpful for underneath countertops, bars and other food handling areas, he says.

Jar traps help target the infestation location and collect specimens so technicians can identify what type of small flies are in house. (See "Eye on Small Flies" below, for additional identification tips.)

Heiney says that larvae can sometimes be identified by scraping a sample of organic material from inside a drain or other area. "If you look at the material from the side, you can see larvae, but you won't be able to see eggs unless you put it under the microscope," he says.

All the while, service technicians must explain to clients exactly what efforts are involved in identifying and controlling small flies. Because the root of the problem is often hidden, and the treatment is not as easy as fogging out an infestation, clients must understand the process so they will value, and therefore buy, the service.

Eye On Small Flies

Identify these small flies on site and the account is ripe for a control program. Asterisks denote most common species. For detailed biology, inspection and control information, refer to the PCT Field Guide for the Management of Structure-Infesting Flies by Stoy A. Hedges.

1. **Small fruit flies*** (*Drosophila* spp.): Measures 1/8 inch in length; tan-colored head and thorax, darker abdomen. Bright red eyes distinguish this fly from phorids.
2. **Phorid flies*** (family Phoridae): Measures 1/8 inch; dark or tan in color with a humpback-shaped thorax; lacking red eyes associated with fruit flies.
3. **Moth flies** (family Psychodidae): Measures 1/8 inch; black in color (some have brown bodies and wings); unique pattern of veins in wings; body and wings are covered with tiny hairs giving it a moth-like appearance.

4. **Sphaerocerid flies** (family Sphaeroceridae): Measures 1/8 inch; on tarsi of the hind leg (last five segments), the first segment is greatly enlarged.
5. **Fungus gnats*** (family Fungivoridae and family Sciaridae): Most measure less than 1/16 inch, (some are ¼ inch or larger); long legs, thick wings; first segment of the leg (the coxae) is long in shape; most are black in color. Differentiate from fungus gnats by comparing pattern of veins in the wing.
6. **Cheese skipper** (*Piophilidae casei*): Small black fly with reddish brown eyes and brown tints on thorax. Wings are slightly iridescent and fold flat over the body. Has lapping mouthparts similar to a housefly. Can “skip” as far as 10 inches.

“This service requires much more searching and communication with customers, guiding them to improve sanitation and pointing out structural repairs [like broken tiles],” says Brian Mann, marketing services manager, BASF Pest Control Solutions, St. Louis, Mo. “It breaks the paradigm of what many customers think pest control is.”

SELLING THE SERVICE. The conversation starter for selling small fly control services is often a customer complaint or a trapped fly. Once a mature population of small flies is hanging around an establishment, the account may question the pest control company.

Pest management professionals must decide whether to sell the service as an add-on, and if so, they should clearly identify all pests the contract does cover and communicate that small flies are not part of the package, Mann says. “The company really needs to distinguish between the service being provided and the service the restaurant [or other account] thinks they are getting in terms of coverage,” he says.

Including small fly control as part of regular services, and charging for it, is another approach. “I think it’s wise that pest management professionals use it to bring extra value to their service, especially when they are trying to retain customers in difficult times,” Mann says. “It’s a point of difference. You certainly don’t want to lose an account for something you are not providing coverage for.”

MARKETING THE SERVICE. Marketing your company’s small fly control service involves identifying potential opportunities. When sales representatives, service technicians and other personnel working for a pest control company recognize a small fly at any place of business, the evidence is plain and simple. “The more face time you get in front of an existing client, the more you can communicate the services you sell,” Feldstein adds, noting that literature helps educate customers.

Spragins has serviced an estimated 300 accounts for small flies. Confronting customers with the problem rather than trapping mature flies and neglecting breeding areas is the key, she says.

“Companies that sell small fly control as an add-on service effectively go out looking for the problem vs. trying to avoid it, as was the case before,” Spragins added.

And today, there are lots of small flies to find, Spragins maintains. “Part of the training process,” she says, “is teaching people how to do the service and building their confidence that they can control the problem so they can go out and aggressively sell it.”

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