

Defend Your Hotel Against 'Occasional Invaders'

By Frank Meek, B.C.E., Technical Director, Orkin, Inc.



Mr. Frank Meek

Occasional invader. To a hotelier, that term might best describe the guy who keeps trying to sell roses in the lobby. But for pest management professionals, the term brings to mind a long list of pests that may not plague hotels as often as roaches, ants, flies and rodents, but that can hurt a hotel's reputation just as badly. Because occasional invaders typically cause problems only when they have invaded in large numbers, a preventive approach is crucial to making sure your hotel doesn't fall victim to an infestation – not even occasionally.

Proper prevention of occasional invaders naturally starts by understanding a little bit about their behavior. They all have something in common. The outdoors.

In most cases, they would prefer to stay outside, but when something makes them uncomfortable in their natural home, they won't hesitate to seek better quarters. Weather – too much rain, not enough rain, too hot, too cold – can encourage them to head for more hospitable environments. Scarcity of food sources or larger predator populations – often tied to weather patterns – also can drive them inside. So, when weather patterns get out of balance in any one direction, expect pests of all kinds to be more of a problem.

Of all commercial buildings, hotels make especially attractive targets for pests on the move. With around-the-clock foot traffic through multiple entrances, they can offer a multitude of opportunities for pests to get inside.

The next step is correct identification. Most hoteliers consult pest management professionals to correctly identify their occasional invaders, but not always. A pest problem may be recurring, making proper identification easier. The official list of occasional invaders in pest control textbooks includes "minor pests" like beetles, weevils, various aquatic insects, caterpillars, centipedes, scorpions and slugs, just to name a few. The actual list is much longer, and few of our hotel customers would call them minor.

If you or your staff have noticed unusual insects or rodents in or around your establishment, it could mean they are invading in large numbers. Typically, infestations have to be significant before the pest becomes a visible nuisance. Because many occasional invaders are seasonal, in some cases time could fix the problem for you, but guests and foodservice inspectors probably won't be willing – to put it mildly – to give you the time to let nature correct the imbalances that drove the pests to your door. As with most problems that crop up when running a hotel, this one calls for immediate action.

Applying pesticide to potential pest entry points is standard operating procedure for many pest management professionals, but it's not always the best way to control occasional invaders. Often, the best treatment is a non-chemical approach, especially for a hotel, where chemical odors or the sight of a technician with his applicator can be a major turnoff for guests.

For almost any pest, an Integrated Pest Management, or IPM, approach that combines several methods of control will get the job done with reduced pesticides. Eliminating sources of moisture or food is one part of the IPM equation, and keeping pests from entering in the first place is another. Consider the following simple IPM steps to significantly reduce your vulnerability to occasional invaders:

- Rake the mulch covers around the building so the soil underneath can dry out.
- Cut back on watering flowerbeds and other landscaping around the building if the mulch cover is starting to break down and deteriorate. Or, simply replace the mulch periodically.
- Install revolving doors in the most heavily trafficked entrances to keep a constant barrier between

indoor and outdoor spaces.

- Place door sweeps on other exterior doors to block crawling pests.
- Seal holes and unnecessary openings in the foundation to prevent pest entry.
- Make sure window screens are in good repair. Even a tiny hole should be patched or the screen should be replaced.
- Hotels with foodservice should inspect all incoming food shipments for signs of pest contamination.

Certainly, there are many more steps you could take as part of a vigilant IPM program to prevent pests – occasional or otherwise. If you'd like more information on how to implement a full-scale IPM program in your hotel, you should consult a licensed pest management professional. Most major IPM service providers offer free, on-site consultations on request.

Frank Meek is a board-certified entomologist and an acknowledged leader in the field of pest management. Orkin provides pest management services to more than 250,000 commercial customers, making it one of the largest commercial pest management providers in North America. For more information, email Frank Meek at fmeek@rollinscorp.com or call 1-800-ORKIN-NOW to schedule a free inspection.

[Back to Hospitality Forum](#)