



How to keep pests from bugging you.

Combating Critters!

Food for Thought

We have all heard the familiar clichés about flies being in the soup or somebody saying don't let the bed bugs bite, but these sayings are real-life scenarios that restaurant and hotel owners dread, because pest sightings by guests make memorable impressions – but certainly not pleasant ones.

The broad definition of pest includes any organism (insect, rodent, bird or fungus) that is persistently annoying and affects human health and environment adversely.

Pest management is a fact of life for foodservice operators. Pests are a general nuisance if they make an appearance during daily operations and are often an even-bigger problem after hours. Already unsightly and unsettling, they can transmit bacteria responsible for causing sickness and disease in humans, including salmonella, dysentery, tuberculosis, strep and food poisoning.

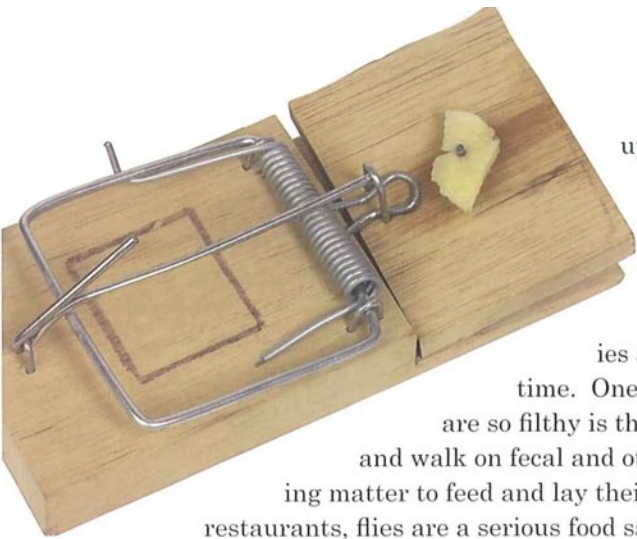
Cockroaches and flies are among the most common culprits to infest kitchens, because they provide an ideal living environment for them to not only live, but breed

as well. While cockroaches can cause serious damage to a restaurant's reputation for cleanliness, flies by far, are the ones most adept to actually transmitting diseases.

According to Tom Cox with Orkin Commercial Services in Winston-Salem, flies can easily become an issue even when there is no food present. He recalled a time when an upscale steakhouse had a fly issue and could not root out the cause because it appeared to be a clean establishment. "After inspecting the place, we discovered pieces of cardboard and food debris underneath the equipment, where most workers wouldn't even clean, let alone work. This is a breeding ground for flies," Cox said. "Sometimes you have to get on your hands and knees to look to see what's really going on." Once the restaurant cleaned up the debris and removed the cardboard, the flies were eliminated.

The Culprits

From a food safety standpoint, one fly is too many, especially since studies show that for every fly seen, there are up to 19 that remain unseen. Flies are covered with



up to a half billion microorganisms on the outside of their bodies at any one time. One reason they are so filthy is that they land and walk on fecal and other decaying matter to feed and lay their eggs. For restaurants, flies are a serious food safety threat because they are attracted to many odors coming from the kitchen or dining areas and can deposit harmful bacteria every time they land on food or a preparation surface.

For restaurants with outdoor dining areas, birds can be a nuisance and may pose serious health risks. While many people find it hard to think of birds as pests, the fact is they can carry many diseases to humans through their droppings. Not only can droppings be left on tables, but they can also be tracked into a restaurant on people's shoes or clothing. If the droppings are not cleaned up immediately, they can easily become airborne and contaminate food.

Just the sight of a rodent is enough to make any customer leave a restaurant to never return, but the more damaging side is that they too carry diseases, including typhus and Hantavirus. They are also hosts for other parasites including fleas, lice and ticks. Rats are commensal creatures because they rely on scraps as a main source of food and restaurants are an extremely attractive source of food, scraps that allow easy entry due to the traffic going in and out. In addition to their ability to carry disease, they also create a nuisance because they gnaw their way through walls, ceiling tiles or electrical wire, causing expensive damage.

The Traveling Freeloader

Full-service hotels face the same pest control issues as restaurants. 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

When hiring a pest management company, consider consulting the following sources:

- The National Pest Management Association's pest management company locator (www.pestworld.org)
- Your state or local pesticide agency
- Your peers. All food-handling establishments require pest management plans. Ask your colleagues for a referral

to get inside. If you or your staff have noticed unusual insects or rodents in or around your establishment, it could mean they're invading in large numbers.

In most cases, infestations have to be significant before the pest becomes a visible nuisance. Because many pests are seasonal, in some cases, time could fix the problem for you, but guests and foodservice inspectors probably won't be willing to give it to you. This is a problem that calls for immediate action.

Bed bug infestations are another problem in hotels and are on the rise. The problem has struck hotels in all parts of the country recently and experts believe it is due to international travel. "These guys can travel pretty long distances

and can go for up to a year without eating," Cox said. Unlike cockroaches, which are common in unkempt environments, bed bugs can be introduced into any setting, and they love hotel guestrooms. Unfortunately, since bed bugs generally arrive via guest luggage, it is hard for hotel operators to prevent the invasion. "Just two bed bugs alone can produce up to 160 offspring in a month," Cox said.

Because of their rising popularity, companies such as Orkin educate hotel staffs on identifying bed bugs and what steps they should take when they notice a problem. "Eliminating the problem is much easier when those involved in the over all make-up and cleaning of the room follow the same procedures and guidelines."

Bed bugs are about the size of an apple seed and have a reddish-brown color. They are often mistaken for ticks or small cockroaches. They feed by sucking blood from

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humans or animals. Once it has been determined that an infestation is present, Cox said that hotel operators will put the rooms where the bugs were present “out of service.” From this point, all linens and sheets are bagged and laundered properly. “It is not necessary to destroy any linens that may have contained the bugs as long as they are properly cleaned,” he said.

In addition to cleaning the linens, ridding the infestation also includes treating the mattress with a steam solution, as this is a common place where the bugs hide and lay their eggs. The headboard of the bed is also removed and treated as well. Finally all electrical sockets are also treated.

Although their bites can result in itchy, bloody welts, bed bugs themselves do not cause any direct health threats.

Choose Your Poison

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. A “green” approved solution and probably the most effective way of keeping pests away, the IPM equation has several components, including inspection, exclusion, landscaping and lighting.

Regular pest management inspections are at the heart of IPM. Foodservice areas require strong focus because they often provide the excess moisture, food sources and

An independent poll of hotel consumers and hotel managers by Orkin showed that the bed bug resurgence is making a majority of Americans more selective when choosing hotels. The poll confirmed what most hoteliers fear – that many victims of bed bug bites will react swiftly and negatively and spread the word too. If bitten by a bed bug while staying at a hotel:

- Nearly nine in 10 respondents – 88 percent would complain to the manager
- 58 percent would never go back to that hotel
- 51 percent would notify the health department
- 50 percent would leave the hotel, and
- 50 percent would tell five or more people about their experience

Key Tips for Preventing Pests

- Seal cracks in walls, floors or ceilings to keep out bugs
- Clean establishment daily to remove food from crates and under equipment
- Eliminate stagnant water outside your establishment
- Place trash receptacles near outside dining facilities so patrons can easily dispose of trash
- Dispose of bags, bottles or cans as soon as they are empty
- Clean and cover trash receptacles and place them on cleanable material, such as concrete. Examine dumpsters to ensure the drain plug is in place – a common point of entry for rodents. Keep dumpsters’ lids sealed and dumpsters away from restaurant entrances

entry points that pests need to thrive. Thorough inspections also will reveal any access points to the facility, including cracks and crevices. To keep pests out, seal all unnecessary openings with a water-resistant sealant and check doors and windows to ensure they are not a prime gateway for pests.

Plants, shrubs and trees around a facility provide harborage areas for pests. Cockroaches and rodents use vegetation as shelter and facility access points. To avoid this, consider trimming or removing vegetation at least two feet from the facility. Lastly, fluorescent lights attract flying insects, so the solution is to use sodium vapor lights. They should be placed in fixtures on or around the immediate exterior of the facility.

Pest control requires constant awareness and effort by both operators and their employees. As you consider selecting a pest management program, it’s important to remember the dangers pests bring into your business. Seeking a free consultation is a good starting point to evaluating how well your restaurant is performing in the fight against pests. The findings may help stop a pest problem before it bites into your business.❖