

Food Safety

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The Buzz on Flies

Flies in particular can pose serious problems for restaurants during the warmer months of the year. They annoy customers, and no matter what health inspection score you have hanging on the wall, the presence of flies signals an unclean establishment to your clientele. But the biggest problem for restaurant owners and managers in terms of potential damage to business is the food safety threat that flies pose.

More Than Unsanitary

Because flies regularly feed on feces and other decaying organic matter, they are often coated in the microorganisms that live in such material. In fact, flies may carry up to a half billion bacteria on the outside of their bodies, including common sources of food-borne illness such as *E. coli*, *shigella* and *staphylococcus*.

Every time a fly lands, it sloughs off thousands of microbes. If flies land on food or utensils, customers may ingest germs that can trigger serious illness such as diarrhea, food poisoning, meningitis and bloodstream infections. An outbreak of such an illness can result in a temporary shutdown of the restaurant by the health department, but the real damage is done to the restaurant's reputation.

Negative word of mouth spreads quickly and can be devastating. If the outbreak is severe enough, the media may report the story to an audience of thousands. Many restaurants have been forced to close due to fallout from a food-borne illness outbreak.

Why Keeping Flies Out Is Such a Challenge

Flies are highly attracted to restaurants for several reasons. The smell of food cooking, especially in the quantities found in a typical commercial kitchen, is a beacon to flies, even at great distances. Likewise, the smell of discarded food products in a restaurant's waste bins is incredibly enticing to flies.

As flies are drawn to a building by these odors, their next move will be to find ways to get inside. Often restaurants give them plenty of opportunities. The heavy foot traffic in and out of eateries means the doors are opening and closing every few

minutes, allowing flies regular chances to enter. Rear entrances propped open for deliveries, windows left open, broken or ill-fitting screens—all are invitations to a fly looking for a meal.

What You Can Do

Despite all the elements of the foodservice business that inevitably draw flies near, the battle to keep them, and the many germs they carry, out of your establishment is one you can win. Pest management providers typically employ a process called Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to make your operation as unfriendly to flies as possible, and you can apply many of these steps yourself. IPM programs use numerous methods to prevent pest infestations and reduce pesticide use, further bolstering food safety in your place. Here are just a few basic IPM methods you should consider employing:

- ✓ Mount exterior lights away from the entrances/exits to draw houseflies away from the doors. Use sodium vapor lights near entrances/exits as flies are less attracted to these types of lights.
- ✓ Make sure that all exterior doors close tightly, forming a seal.
- ✓ Install air curtains over rear entrances and receiving doors to create an inside-out airflow and prevent flying pests from entering. Hanging plastic strip doors in these areas also provides a barrier to entry.
- ✓ Mount fly lights or glue traps near receiving areas and other potential fly "hot spots" in and around food preparation areas.
- ✓ Make sure all trash is collected regularly and removed from the premises in a timely manner.

Remember, for every fly you see, there can be as many as 19 unseen. The longer an infestation is allowed to grow, the more difficult it will be to eradicate. —*Frank Meek*



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Flies are a serious food safety threat. Here's how to get rid of them.