

Use Facility Maintenance to Keep Pests Out

When your customers are enjoying a great meal at your restaurant, the last thing you want is an unwelcome, nonpaying guest to stop in for a bite to eat. Not only can insects and rodents cause a scene if spotted by a customer, but they also can carry disease-causing pathogens that threaten food safety.

To prevent pests from ruining your relationships with your customers and health inspector, enlist facility maintenance techniques to stop pests from entering your establishment in the first place. When it comes to facility maintenance, work with your pest management provider to answer these questions:

How do pests get in?

Pests will jump at any opportunity to enter your restaurant and enjoy the three elements they need for survival: food, water and shelter. While some pests may use an open front door to come inside, loading dock areas and back doors also can allow pests entry since they often remain open for long periods of time when shipments arrive. Some even hitch a ride on the incoming deliveries.

Windows are an easy target and should be inspected regularly to ensure that they are properly sealed. One of the less obvious entry points into your building is also one of the most difficult to spot: small cracks in your building's exterior. Cockroaches only need openings as big as one-sixteenth of an inch to enter, while rats can fit through a hole the size of a quarter.

How can I keep pests out?

To prevent pests from entering your restaurant, target their entry points. Work with your pest management professional to consider these tips:

Front Entrance: Consider installing an automatic door in the front entrance to ensure it remains closed when not in use. Install door sweeps around all doors to ensure a tight seal between the door and the ground.

Windows: Invest in #16 mesh screens in all windows to block even the smallest pests' entry. Add weather stripping to seal gaps around window frames.

Cracks: Inspect your building, especially from the outside and around utilities entering the building—even the roof—for any unnecessary cracks or crevices. Seal any openings with weather-resistant sealant. Carry a pencil when monitoring for openings and fill any holes bigger than the diameter of a pencil. To prevent rodents from digging through the sealant, incorporate copper mesh or steel wool into the sealant as another barrier to entry.

Loading Docks: In high-traffic entrances, consider incorporating additional barriers to pest entry. Install plastic strip doors and/or incorporate positive airflow by using fans to create an air curtain that pests won't be able to penetrate.



What other factors can contribute to pest activity at my restaurant?

The landscaping and lighting around your establishment can influence pest activity.

Landscaping: Trees and bushes in close proximity to your building can provide harborage areas for pests. Rodents don't like to be out in the open, so trim back foliage at least two feet from the sides of your restaurant. Consider creating a gravel strip around the perimeter of your building to deter rodents and provide a mountainous terrain for a crawling insect to cross. Select plants and shrubs that are less attractive to insect and rodent pests.

Lighting: Fluorescent lighting attracts night flying insects, so place fluorescent lights 100 feet from your building—this will draw pests away from rather than toward your restaurant. Fixtures on or near the building should be replaced with sodium vapor lights, which are less attractive to pests.

A thorough facility maintenance program can save you the headaches of time, stress and money by helping to prevent pests before they can become a problem. Regularly monitor your restaurant for signs of pests and make updates to your building as necessary. The result will ensure that only paying guests are making reservations at your restaurant. **<RH**

Dr. Zia Siddiqi, director of quality systems for Orkin, is a board certified entomologist with more than 30 years in the industry. For more information, e-mail zsiddiqi@rollins.com or visit www.orkincommercial.com.

A handful of simple, proactive steps can keep most pest problems from occurring.