

Put the Freeze on Winter Pests

By Patrick T. Copps, MS, B.C.E.
Technical Services Manager, Orkin, LLC

Frosty weather will send more than diners crowding into your restaurant for a warm seat and a hot meal – pests will also try to drop in to dine and seek shelter from the cold. Once they infest, problems can snowball quickly: contaminated food, failed health inspections and raving bad reviews could all threaten to shutter your business.

Protect your restaurant with an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program that prevents pest problems before they occur. Keep an eye out for the critters and creepy-crawlies that are most likely to visit this winter, and work with your pest management provider to put the freeze on pests.



The Regulars

Profile: Rats and mice are this season's "regulars." You can always count on them to show up, head to their favorite corner, and gnaw and nibble on everything from leftovers to trash. These pests will eat most anything on or off the menu; they even chew on electrical wires, which can spark fires. Beyond the ick factor, rodents can carry a full plate of diseases like plague, typhus and hantavirus. The droppings they leave and bacteria they carry contaminate every surface they touch. In fact, mice contaminate 10 times the amount of food they consume.

IPM Recipe:

- **Stay squeaky clean.** Not only will you score points with the health inspector, you'll keep food off the menu for rodents. Clean and rotate dumpsters routinely, wipe down countertops and sweep daily.
- **Control smells.** Reduce the smells that attract rodents by using liners for trash and recycle bins and covering trashcans with tight-fitting lids. Be sure to keep the lids closed on your dumpsters.
- **Wipe it up – eliminate moisture.** Mop up spills immediately and repair leaky sinks, soda dispensers and ice machines. Mice can absorb moisture from their food, but rats need a water source to survive.
- **Shut them out.** Mice can crawl through holes the size of a dime, and rats can squeeze through openings the diameter of a quarter. Seal cracks and crevices with weather-resistant sealant and use steel wool or copper mesh backing so rodents can't chew through it and crawl inside. These furry critters also dislike being out in the open, so consider installing a foot-wide, decorative gravel strip around your building to discourage them from approaching.



The Foodies

Profile: Consider ladybugs, earwigs, wasps and stinkbugs your "foodies." They're occasional guests who come and go with the latest trends – weather trends, that is. This year's early spring, warm summer and fall added up to a longer, more active breeding season for these pests. Some of these occasional invaders may try to overwinter in cracks and crevices inside your restaurant. They'll keep a low profile during the cold months, but if you don't take care, they'll infest in huge numbers come spring.

IPM Recipe:

- **Block entrances.** Ladybugs, earwigs, crickets and stinkbugs all like to creep inside through small openings. Caulk and seal common entry points like cracks around windows, vents, doors, siding and utility penetrations. Install door sweeps and weather stripping to block crawling insects, and patch even tiny holes on window screens.
- **Landscape smartly.** When practical, remove bushes and shrubbery from the exterior of your restaurant and plant them several feet away in the spring. Pests will often use vegetation as staging and feeding sites before entering. Be aware that some flowering plants are particularly attractive to occasional invaders.
- **Inspect deliveries.** Food trucks can carry more than just the ingredients for your daily special. Check incoming shipments for signs of pest contamination, and keep an extra close eye on loading areas.

Patrick Copps is Technical Services Manager for Orkin's Pacific Division. A Board Certified Entomologist in urban and industrial entomology, Mr. Copps has more than 35 years experience in the industry. For more information, email Mr. Copps at pcopps@rollins.com or visit www.orkincommercial.com.