

The Six Steps to a Pest-Free Health Inspection

by Patrick T. Copps

It happens all too often. A health inspector enters an otherwise respected restaurant, finds live pests or evidence of pest activity and shuts the operation down. Management acts quickly to fix the problem, usually re-opening within 24 hours, but by then, several websites have reported the incident and countless potential customers have read and shared the news and online reviews.

Restaurants in resort facilities are prime targets for pests for a number of reasons – the most important being the large amount and variety of mouth-watering food that must be stored, prepared and served. But the resort business is fragile right now, and every customer far too valuable, to risk a hard-earned reputation for quality on a pest problem, especially when a few simple steps can dramatically reduce the risk of a pest infestation.

Orkin serves thousands of restaurants across North America, and we have identified some consistent problem areas for these establishments. With those in mind, here are six ways to keep pests out of your foodservice operation – and your name out of the headlines – when the health inspector arrives.

#1 – Get a grip on receiving

In addition to the obvious attraction of prepared food, resort restaurants are prime pest targets because they also offer relatively easy access. Shipments of food and other supplies are coming in constantly, literally giving pests a back door into the establishment. Sometimes pests come in through the receiving doors, but they also “hitchhike” on shipments, so you have to watch those, too. A few tips for preventing either situation:

- Keep receiving areas clean and uncluttered. This makes the area less attractive to pests. If the areas are well lit, this will make it easier to spot evidence of pests.
- Be sure all exterior doors form a tight seal when closed. If you can see light from the outside when the door is closed, pests can too. Install door sweeps or insulating strips to close any gaps. Mice can squeeze through an opening the size of a dime, while cockroaches need only a 1/16” slit to get inside.
- Monitor supplies carefully for signs of pests. Stored product pests will leave fine webbing in packages of infested dry goods. Look closely in the corners of such packages. Small bite marks signal rodents, and dead insects are a “dead” giveaway, of course.
- Keep useful tools like black lights (which can help spot rodent urine) and flashlights handy during inspections. If you find evidence of infested product, immediately reject the shipment, remove it from the site and notify the vendor.

#2 – Keep a lid on dry storage

Dry goods are a common “jumping off” point for new pest infestations in restaurants. Pests can arrive undetected in a shipment and may later blossom into a full-blown infestation in stored ingredients. Either way, there are several ways to keep pests out of your inventory:

- Be sure all inventory is labeled and dated, and store all goods for rotation on a first in, first out (FIFO) basis. The longer a package is in storage, the more likely it is to become infested (or outdated, for that matter).
- Don't put damaged containers into storage. A damaged container could indicate spoilage or have tiny openings that pests could exploit.
- Keep all containers closed with airtight lids. Store containers at least six inches



off the floor and 18 inches away from walls. This significantly decreases the chances of pests accessing the contents.

- Inspect regularly under and behind storage racks for signs of pests. If you find evidence of pests act quickly to inspect all stored items, sanitize the storage area and take other countermeasures as recommended by a pest management professional who has inspected the site.

#3 – Focus on food prep

The food prep area is one of the most attractive areas for pests and the area of highest risk for food-borne illness from a pest infestation, so it's doubly vulnerable. By far the most effective way to prevent pest-borne food contamination – or any other contamination – is to keep food prep areas ultra-clean.

- Most restaurants' sanitation procedures stipulate intensive cleaning of food prep stations every day (or in some cases, several times per day) to prevent contamination. Be sure your cleaning procedures are rigorous. Pests can make a meal of just about anything – from tiny crumbs under the steam table to grease buildup around the fryer.
- Watch out for leaky dishwashers, ice machines, sinks or other appliances and repair them immediately. Pests thrive on even a little excess moisture. Likewise, clean up any spills and be on the lookout for other sources of standing water in the kitchen.
- Clean grease traps regularly and consider applying an organic cleaner on a routine basis to break down any grease accumulation in drains. This debris can be the perfect food source for a drain fly infestation.

#4 – Remember the restroom

In many establishments, the restroom is a significant pest hot spot because pests love the moisture



commonly found there. Standing water around the sink, toilet or floor drains can be a beacon for pests. Mop regularly, but consider adding a step: simply dry mop behind the wet mopping, so the floor stays clean and dry. As with the kitchen, keep an eye out for plumbing leaks and repair them immediately.

#5 – Don't waste: an opportunity

You don't have to spend much time around a garbage can or a restaurant dumpster to understand why they can encourage pest problems at a resort's foodservice operation. Restaurant dumpsters contain large amounts of decaying food matter, which allows five-star dining for most pests, and these containers can give off pungent odors that can be detected by rodents and some insects at great distances.

- Make sure garbage dumpsters are cleaned and sanitized regularly, away from food preparation and storage areas.
- Be sure dumpsters have working, intact covers to prevent leaks. The only thing more attractive to pests than a dumpster full of food is a dumpster full of wet, decaying food.
- If you have outside garbage cans for patrons, be sure they have tight-fitting lids to keep the odors in check and pests out.

#6 – Write it all down

Following steps 1-5 routinely will help keep pests out, but the health inspector needs evidence of your good work. Make sure all of the following pest

management documentation is available for the inspector's review:

- Scope of service document
- All service reports since the last health inspection
- Any inspection and corrective action reports
- Pesticide usage logs
- Labels and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS)
- Pest control company licenses and insurance certificates

Keep the things pests need – food, water, shelter and access – at bay, and the chances of an infestation plummet. Maintain a good record of your prevention efforts for the health inspector, and avoid losing points unnecessarily. In a world of instant online news and reviews, it's just not worth the risk of leaving your reputation in the hands of a health inspector – or a hungry pest.

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