

Unwelcome Guests

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A proactive way to mitigate your restaurants' pest problems

The success of any business depends on the effort you are willing to put into it. Restaurants are no exception, requiring even more focused attention than most businesses due to their constant exposure to the public. Every restaurant strives to provide a welcoming environment, attentive service and quality food. Patrons expect that—and a restaurant's reputation depends on it.

However, anyone who owns or manages a restaurant knows there is more to a good reputation than serving five-star-rated dishes. All of these front-end efforts will be wasted if there is even a chance of a pest sighting in your restaurant.

A Big Concern

Pests, such as insects and rodents, are serious problems in a restaurant. They can contaminate food supplies and damage facilities. They also contribute to foodborne illness and other diseases. A recent report, commissioned by Rentokil in partnership with the Centre for Economics and Business Research, found that loss of reputation is a major concern for more than 75 percent of U.S. public-facing food businesses. Other significant concerns included loss of income (76 percent), compensation claims (66 percent) and damage to electrical equipment (53 percent).

For these reasons and more, every restaurant must have a strong pest control process in place, including guidance and support from an expert pest control vendor. Pesticides control pests, but pesticides alone are not the solution. The key to combating infestations is understanding pest behavior and proactively managing pest control measures. Different pests display specific behaviors and preferences that help them thrive in their environment of choice. Therefore, it is essential to consider these attributes when designing and implementing measures to prevent or eradicate an infestation.

An Integrated Approach

The most effective solution is to have an integrated pest management (IPM) program as part of your food safety program. IPM is a systematic approach to pest management that minimizes exclusive reliance on chemical pesticides and—instead of only trying to eradicate pests—considers all available preventive and curative options.

While pesticides can play a part in an IPM program, the true goal of IPM is to reduce the amount of pesticides used, which is strongly preferred for a food facility. An IPM plan takes a holistic approach to pest control that utilizes a combination of methods, including sanitation, exclusion, monitoring and documentation.

Sanitation

Addressing sanitation means closely examining the facility to get rid of the food, water and harborage that attract pests. Truly effective sanitation is a multi-faceted effort. Place dumpsters as far away as possible from the building and its entrances. Don't let paper and cardboard pile up, as paper products make ideal nesting material for rodents. Clean drains frequently, since moisture can turn any area into a breeding ground for larvae.

In addition, check incoming shipments thoroughly, as many pests come in with product. Once product is on-site, store it in plastic totes and other rodent-resistant containers. Employ an organized first-in, first-out rotation system to use stored product quickly before pests have time to breed, mature and multiply.

Exclusion

Exclusion prevents pests from entering the facility in the first place, primarily by sealing off access points into the building, such as cracks in the foundation, openings around utility lines and gaps around doors and windows. Install air curtains over frequently used doors, seal gaps at the bottom of entrances and make sure all doors remain closed at all times. Cover pipe openings, place valves on drains and seal fittings that can act as an entryway for rodents and other small pests.

Monitoring

A good monitoring program places traps strategically around the facility to keep track of the numbers and kinds of pests. Using monitors will help to detect when a pest infestation has exceeded a predetermined threshold and determine when corrective action is required. Monitors also serve as an early warning system to help determine what pest issues may be lurking on the horizon, thus allowing you to react before a problem gets serious.

Trap placement needs to be customized for each facility, but some general principles include flanking doors and placing traps along walls, which pests use as a guide to navigate a building. Sanitation also plays a key role in the monitoring process—pests will avoid baited traps if there is real food available to eat.

Know Your Risks

Before implementing such a program, however, it is important to identify which type of pests your restaurant may be at risk of harboring. Some of the most common pests include the following:

- Flies, which are associated with more than 100 disease-causing pathogens, including *E. coli*, and several kinds of food poisoning. They contaminate food and clean surfaces when they land on them. Common areas to target for fly problems include dumpsters, drains and small cracks where moisture and organic material can build up.
- Rodents, which transmit a variety of parasites, viruses and bacteria, contaminate food and can cause fires or explosions when they gnaw through electrical wires and utility lines. Keys to keeping rodents out include sealing doorways, pipes and other small openings. Rodents are attracted to any source of water and nest in areas where paper and cardboard pile up.

- Cockroaches contaminate surfaces and spread diseases by tracking in germs and filth from unsanitary places. They can even trigger asthma attacks in susceptible individuals. Cockroaches most commonly enter a building through drains and are also a risk you
- you need to monitor when inspecting incoming product.
- Pests such as beetles or moths, which feed on and multiply in stored product such as cereals, seeds, spices and dried fruits. Keys to combating stored-product pests include thorough inspection of incoming product and regular inspection and rotation of product already in the facility.

General places to watch out for pests in every food facility are the kitchen, waste areas, storage rooms, and in or around equipment that generates heat and/or moisture. The outside of the building can also attract pests, particularly if you have an outdoor dining area or trash lingering around the facility for any length of time.

Find a Partner

All of these steps are essential in mitigating the risk of pest infestation, but equally important is involving a trained professional to implement them. That person can be part of your in-house food safety team or a trusted vendor.

When deciding on the right person for the job, it's important to target someone who asks questions about your existing pest control practices. Make sure they have a multi-tiered approach when they inspect your facility and proactively make suggestions to improve your sanitation, exclusion and monitoring systems.

Once your IPM plan is ready and your internal or external pest control expert is in place, consistent implementation is critical, as is evaluation of the program on a regular basis. A successfully integrated pest management program ensures your facility passes inspection and leads to the end goal of food safety: happy patrons who return time after time..

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