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Shoo, Flies!

Douglas Gardner

A cockroach can cause a customer to cringe, and a rodent can send them running.

But while a fly may be seen as a mere nuisance during a meal, its habits can make it one of the filthiest pests around food establishments. The house fly, for example, has been found to carry more than 100 different pathogenic organisms, which it can easily transfer to food and food handling surfaces.

The Journey from Filth to Food

The notorious group of flies, referred to as “filth flies,” is aptly named, due to this insect’s sponging mouth parts and affinity for filth. Three common filth flies are the house fly, bottle fly and blow fly.

House flies get their name from being the most common fly around the home. Adults lay their eggs in any warm, moist, decaying organic material on which larvae can feed when they hatch. Main breeding sites can include manure, dumpsters, garbage and decaying vegetation, where bacteria and other microorganisms thrive. Adult house flies are attracted to a variety of foods, including the foods we like to eat.

Bottle and blow flies have many similarities and can often be seen near slaughter houses, meat processing plants and garbage dumps. Their feeding habits are similar to the house fly, but they are more attracted to proteins. Although bottle and blow flies have been known to lay their eggs on many types of decaying organic matter, they prefer meat or dead animals.

Filth flies visiting food service facilities have likely already visited unsanitary breeding sites and lived in filth as maggots. Adult filth flies cannot eat solid food. They regurgitate stomach content, including their last meal, bacteria, enzymes and stomach acid, to help dissolve solids. They then mop up these liquids with their sponging mouth parts.

Filth flies frequenting your facility may be breeding at locations up to 1 mile away. Populations generally increase in warm-weather months, as heat will cause rapid decomposition of vegetation and other organic matter, providing ample food for filth flies and their larvae. Filth flies have a keen sense of smell and will follow food odors through open delivery doors, holes in window screens and other exterior entry points.

Reducing Filth Fly Infestations

The presence of filth flies can cause customers to question the sanitation of your facility, posing a risk to your reputation and revenue. To protect your business, and shield your customers from the health risk posed by this pest, you and your pest service provider should follow certain steps.

An integrated pest management program aimed at filth flies will include sanitation, exclusion and suppression.

Sanitation

Filth flies migrate to warm areas and breed in garbage, trash compactors and overripe or rotting vegetables and can spread to your facility from adjacent properties. Any accessible food or water supply can cause a major fly infestation. By keeping your environment clean and sanitary, especially during warmweather months, flies will have little incentive to come into or near your facility.

- Position garbage storage away from entry doors.
- Bag and seal garbage in durable plastic garbage bags.
- Under-stuff and tie off garbage bags to eliminate spillage.

- Pave or seal the area beneath and around dumpsters.
- Keep all garbage and dumpster lids tightly closed.
- Remove spilled food materials and garbage from the ground and surrounding areas. If there is an exterior dining area, make sure it is being properly maintained.
- Continue good sanitation practices on the interior of the facility.

Exclusion

The best way to prevent filth flies is to keep them out. Exterior fly bait stations can be a weapon in your fight against filth flies, targeting flies around dumpsters, garbage bins and other nearby breeding sights. Eliminating entry points helps prevent flies from finding their way into your facility.

- Loading-dock doors and service entries should have air curtains in place where possible. If they are already in place and functioning properly, make sure they are not being turned off by day staff.
- Keep windows and doors closed as much as possible. Equip windows with properly fitting screens and doors with door sweeps and selfclosing mechanisms.
- Make sure any exterior entry points for utility wires and plumbing are properly sealed and all vents are securely screened.
- Negative air pressures outside of entryways pull flying insects into a facility. In many cases, making adjustments to the HVAC system can alleviate this problem.

Suppression

Suppression helps reduce existing fly populations. Discreet fly lights installed inside your facility offer a non-pesticide approach to reducing indoor populations. In addition, you can partner with a pest service provider to identify fly-conducive conditions in and around your facility, ensure that exclusion and suppression devices are maintained and operating at peak effectiveness, and treat affected areas when necessary.

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