Protecting Your Reputation... and Your Bottom Line
Effective Rodent Control for Your Restaurant

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Rodent control can be an unsettling topic – no one feels comfortable in the presence of unwelcome pests. For restaurants however, the importance of rodent control extends beyond personal comfort into significant public image and financial repercussions. *A restaurant is only as successful as its reputation, and nothing destroys a hard-built reputation faster than a single mouse or rat seen scurrying across the floor.*

Word-of-mouth – the cornerstone marketing tool of every successful restaurant – becomes a restaurant’s worst enemy in the wake of rodent infestation. A poll of foodservice consumers conducted by Orkin, Inc., found that more than 60% of frequent restaurant diners would tell five or more acquaintances about a pest sighting at a restaurant.* As today’s definition of ‘acquaintance’ has expanded to include social media contacts, one customer’s circle of influence becomes global with a single click. And no need to take the customer’s word for it – smartphone videos capturing rodent activity can be posted online and viral within a matter of hours. There is simply no containing a rodent story once exposed.

The cost of proactively controlling rodents is miniscule compared to the losses incurred through infestation. The primary influence on the effectiveness of a rodent control program is the person or team responsible for its implementation – and you, as the restaurant owner and/or manager, must lead the charge. Managing a comprehensive rodent control program requires thorough understanding of the issues involved and a high level of commitment to success.

**Considering the alternative, it takes very little time and money to prevent a rodent problem.**

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*Independent online poll, Orkin Inc., October 2009*
A Proactive Approach: By the Time You Notice a Problem, the Damage is Already Done

Effective rodent control is more critical to the restaurant industry than almost any other business. More important than good food or solid service, it is fundamental to the very survival of a restaurant. Unfortunately, a comprehensive pest management strategy can be as challenging for the restaurant industry as it is imperative. For many obvious reasons – food odors and scraps, warm air currents, cluttered storage areas, densely populated locations – restaurants provide an ideal target for commensal rodents. (the name ‘commensal’ is literally defined as ‘sharing one’s table’). The food industry becomes more competitive every day, and the last thing restaurant owners and operators can afford is a rodent issue. Once rodents have made their way in, extermination is an expensive and temporary measure, creating added concerns related to chemicals and food safety. Without safeguarding a restaurant’s access points through comprehensive exclusion, the costly cycle of rodent infestation continues indefinitely.

Never has the phrase “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” been more accurate than in regards to effective pest management for restaurants. Exclusion – creating proven physical barriers against rodents and pests to keep them from entering a building in the first place – is widely recognized among professionals as the most effective pest management strategy. Fortunately it is also one of the least expensive.

Business, customer and employee demands must remain the top priority for busy restaurateurs leaving little time for anything else. So rodent control solutions must be easy to implement, inexpensive and above all, work the first time and every time.
The True Cost of Infestation: Wallets Aren't Always the Hardest Thing Hit

For restaurants faced with rodent infestation, the cost of extermination is merely the tip of the iceberg in regard to negative impact on the business. Food and surface contamination caused by rodents is exponential relative to their size. In 24 hours, one mouse can urinate up to several thousand times in micro-droplets and produce up to 75 droppings (Corrigan, Robert. Rodent Pest Management in Commercial Business. 2001). In six months, a single pair of mice can eat four pounds of food and contaminate 10 times that amount. (Government of Alberta, “Mice and Their Control”.) In one year, rats and mice destroy enough food to feed 200 million people (PestWorld.org).

And of course impacted restaurants can face significant fines and even temporary or permanent closure from the public health department. With negative publicity surrounding restaurants with rodent trouble on the rise, pest control is taking newfound priority among many public health departments. A typical large city in the United States receives more than 10,000 complaints about rodent problems a year and performs tens of thousands of rodent control inspections (Illinois Department of Public Health). Many public health departments post inspection histories online, and an increased number of media outlets are publishing inspection reports, which means even if allowed to remain open, restaurants with rodent citations are likely to be exposed to the public.

Strict public health guidelines to protect against rodents exist for good reason. Rodents spread Salmonella and other bacteria through their droppings. They can trigger asthma and carry parasites such as fleas, mites and lice. Rodent excrement and saliva carry diseases, including murine typhus, infectious jaundice, rat-bite fever and the rare but serious Hantavirus – a life-threatening disease carried primarily by deer mice found throughout most of the United States. Each year, upwards of 45,000 Americans are bitten by rats (National Pest Management Association).
The True Cost of Infestation: 
WALLETS Aren’t Always the Hardest Thing Hit

In addition to health and sanitation concerns, rodent infestation can result in significant property damage. These pests are relentless in their pursuit of food and shelter, and will gnaw through any number of materials including window screens, wood, fiberglass, plastic, drywall and even certain concrete. It is estimated that 25% of all fires attributed to “unknown causes” are probably started by rodents gnawing on gas lines, electrical wires and/or matches (Illinois Department of Public Health).

The financial, emotional and health-related ramifications of a rodent infestation are frightening. But even more terrifying is the question, “What if this rodent issue goes public?” The court of public opinion is swift, powerful, and holds a zero tolerance policy towards anything rodent-related where their food is concerned. A single mouse spotted by a single customer means the extensive list of infestation expenses – extermination, food contamination, structural damage, man hours – is compounded by a significant and possibly fatal loss of reputation and customer base.

The High Cost of Rodents to Restaurants

- Extermination
- Food contamination
- Infrastructure damage
- Buildings and structural damage
- Aesthetics
- Lost time and productivity
- Psychological wellbeing and health of owner operators, employees and customers
Twenty years ago, the primary approach to rodent control in urban environments involved rodenticides – harsh chemicals and poisons used to exterminate an infestation once identified. As with all technologies, however, the science of rodent control has evolved to provide greater efficacy and improved safety at a lower cost.

According to Dr. Robert Corrigan, Rodentology PhD, author and leading industry expert, controlling rodents requires the implementation of the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) model – a comprehensive approach including monitoring, sanitation, exclusion, and, only if necessary, the application of rodenticides. “Rodenticides should be considered as a last resort, especially around food stores, food serving establishments and any shop that the public frequents.”

Unfortunately, despite the proven benefits of the IPM model, in 2012 rodenticides still accounted for up to 80% of rodent control products purchased. A recent study of small businesses in New York City’s Chinatown found that most businesses with a rodent problem had failed to implement exclusion methods (Almeida, Anthony; Corrigan, Robert; and Sarno, Ronald (2013) “The Economic Impact of Commensal Rodents on Small Businesses in Manhattan’s Chinatown: trends and possible causes,” Suburban Sustainability: Vol. 1: Iss. 1, Article 2.). Thus the cycle of rodent infestation continues.

Every state in the U.S. maintains its own set of restaurant guidelines and violations in regards to pest control. Most are available online, and it is important that restaurant owners stay well-educated to ensure their business is adhering to these code standards. Regular self-inspections are critical – recognizing violations or potential issues and correcting them on an ongoing basis protects both your customers and your business.

“Operators who monitor their sanitary practices daily and correct violations on their own are more likely to do well on inspections.”

New York Department of Public Health

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In the United States, rats cause an estimated $19 billion per year in losses and damages. (David Pimentel et al., “Economic and environmental threats of alien plant, animal, and microbe invasions”, 1999.)
Don’t Roll Out the Rodent Red Carpet: How to Protect Yourself

According to Dr. Austin Frishman, world-renowned entomologist and pest management consultant, “the success of pest management in the food industry is not a complicated or hidden secret. We know what it requires. Eliminating conducive conditions before they occur prevents problems from occurring. Within the last few years, new rodent proofing material has become available to keep pests out even after hurricanes. Properly installed, these specialized door sweeps and fiber fabrics in wall and floor cracks and voids work wonders to keep pests out.”

According to the Mallis Handbook of Pest Control, a combination of exclusion and sanitation provides the best long-term and cost effective component of any rodent IPM program. Fundamentally, exclusion involves the elimination of cracks, crevices, and other spaces to prevent pests from entering a building. Rodents can squeeze through an opening as small as ¼ inch, which means access points are not hard for them to find. Common rodent entry points include: exterior doors, garage and/or loading dock doors, air vents, and at points where electrical, water, gas, sewer and HVAC lines enter the building. Rats and mice can also gain entry through small cracks in the foundation, by gnawing through rubber door sweeps, and beneath roofing tiles.

“The bottom line is that pest proofing is effective in eliminating recurring pest problems for many residential and commercial facilities, especially those that produce food odors and temperatures highly attractive to pests (e.g. restaurants, hotels, schools).” Mallis Handbook of Pest Control
Think Exclusion

- Safeguard your doors. Wooden doors are continuously vulnerable to the gnawing of rats. Sheet iron flashing should be installed surrounding the door, and any clearance below the door must be smaller than 3/8 inch. All doors should remain closed when not in use and be fitted with proven, specialized rodent-proof door sweeps.

- Ventilator grills and windows should be protected with proper and proven exclusion materials, ensuring any voids or cracks are filled.

- Defective drain pipes provide a transportation pipeline for rodents. A perforated metal cover should be cemented over the drain pipe, and any small openings surrounding the drain where it enters the building should be patched or filled with proven exclusion materials.

- Large sidewalk cracks should be sealed, as these crevices allow rodents to access a restaurant’s foundation and search for entry points. Foundation walls can be protected with barriers of metal, concrete, or brick around and below the foundation.

- In addition to squeezing through miniscule openings, rats and mice can climb wires and rough surfaces with relative ease. Circular rat guards should be placed around all vertical wires and pipes.

- Ensure that cracked or broken roofing tiles are replaced as needed, and utilize proven exclusion material to fill any voids.

- And remember - windows break, pipes rust, concrete deteriorates, creating new rodent access points at any time. Successful exclusion requires ongoing vigilance and upkeep.
Don’t Roll Out the Rodent Red Carpet: How to Protect Yourself

The amount of food scraps capable of sustaining a rodent population is very small. While nearly impossible for a restaurant to maintain a level of sanitation that eliminates food waste entirely, the cleaner the facility, the easier it is to prevent rodent intrusion.

Keep It Clean

- Restaurant exteriors should be as clean and uncluttered as possible. Trash must be disposed in clean, tightly-sealed containers and stored as far from the building as possible. Trash removal should be frequent enough to ensure the containers are not a reliable rodent food source – ideally two or more times per week.

- Standing water attracts rodents. Gutters should be free of debris and channel water away from the building. Leaky faucets, pipes and air-conditioning units should be repaired or replaced. Water should not be left standing in sinks overnight, and storage rooms and basements should be dry and well-ventilated.

- Avoid clutter as much as possible – boxes left on the ground are popular nesting grounds for rodents. Cabinet bases, storage shelving voids and the tiny space behind appliances are also prime targets.

- Storage areas containing bagged or powdered food should be monitored consistently with stock rotated frequently. Whenever possible, food products should be stored away from the walls to reduce the risk of contamination.

- Store food properly in sealed, rodent-proof containers made of metal or hard plastic. Any spills should be addressed as soon as possible.

- Appliances, equipment, food contact surfaces and all floors should be cleaned and sanitized regularly to eliminate any sources of food for rodents. High volume areas where crumbs and trash are likely to accumulate must be cleaned frequently.

- Employees should be trained to notice and report evidence of pests (e.g. rodent droppings in undisturbed areas), which indicate a pest problem that should be addressed immediately.
Your Best line of Defense

A diligent, comprehensive and well-supported exclusion plan is still only as effective as the barrier products correctly installed.

**Door Sweeps**

As is the case with most product solutions, you get what you pay for. A standard rubber door sweep may be inexpensive and conveniently purchased from the local home store, but it won’t last the week against a determined mouse or rat. Non-reinforced rubber or vinyl seals can be gnawed through easily by even the smallest of rodents. Xcluder™ Pest Control Door Sweeps feature reinforced neoprene gaskets lined with Xcluder rodent-proof fill fabric – a patented combination of stainless steel and poly-fiber that is virtually impenetrable to rats, mice and insects.

**Eliminating Cracks & Crevices**

Caulk, mortar, spray foam, steel wool and copper mesh are all popular solutions in this area of exclusion. While inexpensive, caulk, mortar and spray foam products offer little to no protection against gnawing rodents. Steel wool can work, but faces rusting and decomposition over time and therefore requires regular replacement. Copper mesh can be an effective solution; however the mesh can become loose over time, compromising its efficacy. It also can be difficult to install to ensure a secure seal and faces discoloration over time, which leads to staining.
Your Best line of Defense

Eliminating Cracks & Crevices

Xcluder fill fabric compresses during installation to 'spring back' once in place to create a permanent seal, and its combination of stainless steel and poly-fibers will not rust or degrade over time. And while 10” of copper mesh will fill one 1” hole, the same amount of Xcluder will protect 10 holes of that size, making it highly cost effective.

What About Repellents?

Repellents – chemicals designed to discourage rodent presence without harming them – are both unsafe for use in the restaurant industry and ineffective overall. Repellents cannot be used on or near food products, and though the chemicals may cause rodents some amount of discomfort, the resulting distress is not nearly strong enough to deter them from their pursuit of food and shelter.

Sonic devices producing ultrahigh or ultralow frequency sounds to deter rodents are enticing, but unfortunately have been deemed entirely ineffective by the scientific community. As most rodents hear the same range of frequencies as humans, any sound that doesn't bother us is unlikely to bother them. (Gerald M. Ghidiu, Ph.D. and Louis M. Vasvary, Ph.D. (2004) “Ultrasonic and Subsonic Devices for Pest Control,” Rutgers Cooperative Research & Extension)
Protecting a restaurant’s reputation is priority #1 for any owner operator, and the impact of a rodent infestation can be devastating. The loss of reputation, time, revenue and peace-of-mind that accompany a rodent infestation is why Integrated Pest Management practices are critical to the longevity of any restaurant. A proactive combination of exclusion and sanitation is the only proven solution for long-term protection. Exclusion and sanitation require diligence and a focused effort by those responsible for their success, but the minimal time and financial resources required to execute them are insignificant when compared to the business losses associated with rodent infestation.

Rats cause an estimated $19 billion per year in losses and damages (Pimentel, et al. 1999), and Xcluder’s line of rodent-proof exclusion products are a restaurant owner’s best line of defense. Store-bought quick fixes such as steel wool and spray foam may satisfy a health inspector, but do not provide the level of protection that is critical to a restaurant’s survival.

Xcluder is the only exclusion material proven effective by the USDA APHIS Lab, offering unparalleled protection in the form of fill fabric for cracks and crevices, rodent-proof door sweeps for exterior doors and rodent-proof door seals for loading dock and garage doors.

“In an economy where 70% to 80% of market value comes from hard-to-assess intangible assets such as brand equity, intellectual capital, and goodwill, organizations are especially vulnerable to anything that damages their reputations. Most companies, however, do an inadequate job of managing their reputations in general and the risks to their reputations in particular. They tend to focus their energies on handling the threats to their reputations that have already surfaced. This is not risk management; it is crisis management.” Harvard Business Review “Review Reputation and its Risks” by Robert G. Eccles, Scott C. Newquist and Roland Schatz, February 2007.
An Ounce Of Protection
Is Worth (More Than!) A Pound Of Cure

"Keep the rodents out and your bottom line does not suffer. Start with rodent proofing all exterior doors, sealing cracks and openings and proper sanitation. Early warning detection by all employees is essential. Work with a pest management professional to develop a winning team."
Austin Frishman, PhD.

Every business owner knows that risk management is preferable to crisis management. Unfortunately, many restaurants don’t focus their attention on rodent control until the problem is inside their walls, which is too late.

It’s cliché but true – an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure (and many, many pounds of contaminated food where rodents are concerned). IPM practices involving exclusion and sanitation are simply the best prevention money can buy. Contact a pest management professional that understands and supports exclusion methods and work to develop and implement a comprehensive plan that protects both interior and exterior weaknesses. Reiterate to employees the importance of sanitation and facility monitoring for signs of rodent activity. And rely on proven, long-term exclusion solutions to protect both your customers and your business.