

The five Ws of integrated pest management

As a pest management professional, Lance Van Zant, branch manager at Clark Pest Control's Auburn, CA service center, is frequently asked to assess food handling and processing establishments and help improve their existing integrated pest management (IPM) programs.

When Van Zant inspects a facility – whether it's a new or existing client – for pest activity, he asks some very important questions to help identify the root cause of the pest issue, and why there might be a higher risk of possible pest activity at that facility. One rogue roof rat can occupy a lot of time and resources, and the quicker that data is gathered, the faster a solution and root cause can be identified.

Five important questions

Pest management is often compared to detective work, and a good detective asks plenty of questions of their clients and themselves.

1. Who are the target pests? It's important to identify all possible pests in a facility. The pests that are most likely to be encountered are rodents, cockroaches, and flies, but what about stored

product pests, small flies, and occasional invaders? They also may be an issue for this specific facility.

2. What are the health risks for each target pest? This is critical, because some pests are a higher risk to the public than others. Spiders are less likely to carry pathogens than cockroaches and rodents, but what if the facility is prone to having black widow spiders? What about fruit flies? Most people think fruit flies are harmless insects, but studies show that they can spread harmful pathogens to food preparation areas.

3. When did, or do, these pests become an issue for the client? What does the trending data tell us? Is the service technician noting the activity levels? Is the trend analysis telling us when activity is higher during different times of the year? Is the rodent activity historically worse in the fall and winter months? Does the pest management plan prepare for such a spike in activity levels?

4. Where are the pests coming from? All pest activity comes from somewhere. Most pests are brought into a facility via deliveries and employees. The source of most cockroach infestations is from these two "Trojan horses." Rodents are



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either brought in from deliveries or from a lack of rodent exclusion. Remember: a mouse only needs a 1/4" hole, gap, or void to gain access into a structure. When was the last time someone on the maintenance staff or the technician checked the door seals? Are the exterior doors being propped open by employees?

5. Why are the pests able to thrive at this facility? Answering this question is the key to identifying the root cause of the problem. If small flies (fruit flies, drain flies, etc.) are in the facility, the question is: Why are they there? Pests need food, water, and shelter to thrive. When was the last time someone inspected and cleaned the drain lines? No amount of fogging and spraying will solve a small fly problem if the source of the activity is in the drain lines. You'll end up wasting time and money trying to solve the problem. When you remove these conducive conditions from the scenario, it solves the pest problem.

Finding the root cause

Pest activity is usually a symptom of another problem – pests don't show up at a commercial property for no reason. According to Van Zant, the key to finding the root cause and solving the problem is to ask the right questions. An assessment or inspection of the facility must be completed before coming up with a plan or program on how to solve the problem.

It's important for the client to be involved in the process to help resolve the conducive conditions.

Otherwise, the facility could become a higher risk to the safety of employees, guests, and customers. When there is cooperation between the facility's staff and the pest management service provider, the pest management program will become more proactive and focused on preventive actions, rather than reactive ones. 🐛



If your commercial property demands innovative pest management solutions and a pest management partner that understands your business, call Clark Pest Control at (800) 936-3339.



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