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Restaurant HOSPITALITY

IDEAS FOR FULL-SERVICE RESTAURANTS

How to stop winter's rodent rush

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According to a study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that examined foodborne disease outbreaks from 2009 to 2010, among those outbreaks with a known single setting where food was consumed, 48 percent occurred from food consumed in a restaurant or deli. While there are many reasons behind such outbreaks, diseases and pathogens from pest infestations are among the culprits.

As restaurant owners and operators know all too well, pest management is likely one of the biggest challenges they face on a daily basis. The abundance of food, ideal moisture and temperature conditions provide pests with various harborage and nesting sites, making restaurants one of the most ideal environments for pests. Although a number of species can be problematic in restaurants year-round, in winter months, rodents tend to be of most concern. Because rodents don't discriminate between fast food and five-star restaurants, they will make themselves at home wherever and however they can.

Rodent hazards

Rats and mice are known as commensal rodents, a very appropriate term as commensal means "sharing one's table." Although people may shudder at the thought, these pests have been "sharing" people's food and shelter for centuries. The three most common commensal rodent pests are the house mouse, the Norway rat and the roof rat.

In a restaurant, the presence of rodents can result in food and surface contamination, fines from the health department and in severe cases, temporary or permanent closure of the establishment. Economic losses as a result of rodent infestations are staggering. In fact, experts estimate that rats and mice destroy enough food each year to feed 200 million people by attacking food

in farm fields, orchards, processing and food storage and service facilities, as well as people's homes.

Rodents are particularly problematic for restaurateurs because of the many health implications they pose. They spread Salmonella and other bacteria through their droppings, can trigger allergies and asthma attacks as a result of a protein in their urine, and bring with them other diseases such as murine typhus, infectious jaundice, Weil's Disease and rat-bite fever. In addition to the health and sanitation concerns, rodent infestations can also damage property as they chew through wood and drywall, and can even gnaw through electrical wires, causing fires.

Keeping rodents out

One surefire way to help control rodents in a restaurant is to take measures to prevent their entry in the first place. However, exclusion is much easier said than done in an establishment where food preparation, guest services and efficiency are of the utmost importance and watching the loading dock, immediately wiping up spills or dropped food and checking entry points can become secondary.

Because of these challenges, restaurant managers should work with their pest professional to identify the establishment's "hot spots," which are those areas especially vulnerable to rodent infestations. While every restaurant is different, there are several common areas all restaurants share:

Dumpsters: Dumpsters pose one of the biggest outdoor magnets for attracting rodents if the waste is not stored and disposed of properly. It is important to keep food debris to a minimum, completely close bags and food packages and keep the dumpster lids shut tight.

Doorways: Leaving kitchen doors open, even just a crack, is like rolling out the red carpet for rodents. Ensure employees are not propping doors open. They should be closed tightly at all times when not in use.

Utilities: Mice can squeeze through spaces as small as a dime and rats can fit through holes the size of a quarter, so it is essential to close any cracks or openings in areas where there are utility lines and pipes, using sealants such as mortar and caulk, as well as metal and coarse steel wool.

Storage areas: Rodents can easily hide and nest in clutter. Tidying up storage areas in the back of the house, keeping boxes off the floor at all times and examining incoming deliveries prior to storing them are critical steps for eliminating harborage areas.

Kitchen: Thoroughly clean appliances and equipment, continuously sanitize food contact surfaces and mop floors to eliminate any sources of food for rodents.

Advice from the pros

Rodent treatment and prevention in restaurants, much like in supermarkets, hospitals, food plants, schools and other similar environments, require the assistance of pest management experts. Pest professionals can properly identify the rodent species and thereby better understand its biology and behavior/habits if a problem is currently in place. They can also develop a

proactive integrated pest management (IPM) plan to prevent the pests from entering in the first place.

Also, due to changing food safety regulations, it is impossible for pest professionals to use a one-size-fits-all approach to rodent management in restaurants. For this reason, pest professionals must conduct a thorough assessment of the establishment and determine what conducive rodent conditions exist before employing one or more of the following tools: sanitation, trapping and baiting, proper storage practices and the use of both nonchemical and chemical treatments. Lastly, restaurateurs must also educate employees about their role in preventing infestations by implementing proper sanitation and food storage requirements.

Rodents are particularly resourceful at finding their way indoors, especially into prime locations serving up food and shelter. Restaurateurs need to be resourceful, too—not only to remain in compliance with the health code, but also to protect their establishments from lost revenue, diners and against forced closure.

Missy Henriksen is the vice president of public affairs and Jim Fredericks is the director of technical services for the National Pest Management Association. The NPMA, a non-profit organization with more than 7,000 members, was established in 1933 to support the pest management industry's commitment to the protection of public health, food and property. For more information about pests and prevention tips, please visit www.PestWorld.org.