

Integrated Pest Management Offers a Better Mousetrap

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Having proactive plans and programs to manage the sanitation conditions in a plant so that the facility is not creating harborages and desirable conditions for pests is advisable and often required by auditors and regulations. For food processors, pest control is a complex challenge. Though processors have been credited with successfully removing most agricultural pesticide residues before food products reach the marketplace, food processing itself can attract pests of all kinds. A variety of EPA-approved pesticides are available for use in processing facilities, but a better, long-term solution is to prevent infestation in the first place.

Taking a holistic approach

Pesticides are often the method used to control pests, but pesticides alone are not the solution. A better solution is to have an integrated pest management (IPM) program as part of your food safety program. IPM is an approach to pest management that minimizes reliance on chemical pesticides and — instead of only trying to eradicate pests — considers all available preventative and curative options.

The first step is to take a holistic and comprehensive approach to pest control, including a close examination of the physical plant to get rid of the food, water and harborage that attract pests. Pest control managers should first look for evidence of infestation, such as rodent droppings or actual pest sightings, especially in the most likely places — near dumpsters, loading docks, anywhere moisture collects inside or outside the plant, around light fixtures inside and outside or wherever food or food

residue can accumulate in tough-to-reach places.

Sealing the facility from pests goes a long way toward preventing infestation and can reduce the need for pesticides, but it's not the whole solution. Where evidence of pests is found, it's important to identify them — rodents, beetles, flies, etc. — and to determine when and how frequently you are finding those specific pests and in which specific part of the plant in order to analyze how they might be getting in. You also will need to determine the most effective way for your facility to eliminate them, including the use of chemical pesticides, bait traps, diligent sanitation or other means.

Once an IPM plan is developed, it is critical to implement it on a consistent basis, and this means enlisting the support of company officers as well as production employees. The pest control manager's task is to ensure that recommendations for repairs to the physical plant are implemented. Finally, the effects of the IPM plan should be monitored, reported, and recorded. It's important to remember that even if one problem area is cleared of pests, infestation may recur — or evidence of pests may be found elsewhere in the facility. Although there are many options for eliminating pests, prevention is a better long-term solution and requires continuing effort.

Summing up

In general terms, an effective IPM plan includes four steps:

1. Inspect the physical plant both inside and outside for ways in which pests might enter the building, as well as for the food, water and harborage that may attract pests and allow them access into the facility. While it is easy to neglect corners when cleaning, they are a common problem area for pests for just that reason.
2. Identify any pests that exist and develop a specific plan to eliminate them using mechanical or bait traps, pesticides or other appropriate means. Develop a system for tracking type, frequency and number of pests caught in each identified area of the facility.
3. Enlist the support of company management as well as production workers to implement the program. Train your sanitation staff to thoroughly clean problem areas according to a specific sanitation schedule.
4. Continuously monitor the program and record results. In this way, you can prove success and/or adjust the program if, when and where necessary.

Pest control is forever a concern for food producers at large. It's a task that requires knowledge and expertise to comply with national and local regulations and the requirements of third-party auditors. Additionally, the cleanliness and safety of your food products are equated with your brand's reputation, which makes paying attention to a meticulously-kept facility of critical importance. An investment in an effective IPM plan helps ensure the safety and quality of the products being delivered to consumers.

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