

M

ice and Other Rodents

No facility manager wants to hear that they have mice or rats in the building but we have to recognise just how widespread they are. House mice originated in Asia but have since spread throughout the world. Along with brown rats, they are considered to be the most widespread terrestrial mammal other than humans.

Two changes in the way we use our buildings have been especially favourable for mice. The first is the continual recabling and retrofitting of older structures, which disturbs existing populations and provides a network of highways for them that greatly facilitates their dispersal throughout a building.

The second is the trend toward longer work patterns in many offices, combined with our obsession with snack foods. Between the crumbs, the discards, and the stashes in desk drawers, our resident mice are presented with a daily feast. The House Mouse only needs around 3g of food a day and can survive without any additional water although they will drink up to 3ml a day if their diet is particularly dry.

Mice are usually nocturnal, so are rarely seen in our office buildings but signs to watch out for are thin, spindle shaped droppings, damaged stock and building fabric, shredded nesting material and a distinctive ammonia-like smell.

Both mice and rats are known to spread infections and can also cause considerable damage to stock and buildings. They have sharp teeth and can gnaw through cables, plastic and wooden doors as well as contaminating foodstuffs and goods. On the underside of rodents, the wet fur soaked in urine can transmit diseases to work surfaces or anywhere the mouse has climbed.

Sustainable mouse control requires improved housekeeping. Employees who complain their food has been chewed on by a mouse are not victims; they are the source of the problem. Anything edible must be stored in mouse-proof containers and no food waste should be discarded in open bins.

There is no practical way that most workplaces can be made totally secure against mice entering from the outside. However, there are certain predictable access routes like fan coil ducting, doorways and vents where sealing efforts can make a real difference in impeding mouse movement.

Although trapping is the technique of choice when mouse numbers are low, rodenticide bait may be the only practical way to get control when they are high. Unlike with larger animals, odour from the poisoned mice is generally not a problem. It is critical that all bait stations be tamper-resistant and located out of the public view.

The best pest control technicians are forever opening panels, checking behind things, and shining their torches into dark nooks and crannies. Unless guided by effective inspection, mouse suppression efforts can quickly degenerate into a haphazard exercise in futility. There must also be enough recordkeeping to detect patterns and provide an objective evaluation of control efficacy.

The British Pest Control Association (BPCA) is a not for profit organisation which represents the pest management industry within the UK www.bpca.org.uk