Electronic Monitoring & Smarter Product Solutions Help Food Processors Protect Facilities from Rats

Rats are known to cause significant issues for food processing facilities, from food damage and contamination to the spread of disease through droppings and urine. In the US, the economic cost of rat damage was estimated at $19 billion a year; many times, greater than any other invasive animal species (Pimentel et al. 2000). The key to controlling rats is developing a plan that is mostly preventative, rather than simply reacting to the problem when it occurs.

A rat infestation in a food processing plant can be especially devastating as a rat can fit through any opening ½-inch or larger in diameter. Once inside a facility, a rat will shed over 500,000 body hairs and can leave up to 25,000 droppings in a single year – this is per rat.

There are two main types of rats in the United States: the roof rat and the Norway rat. Roof rats are typically found in the southern states, from Florida to California up north to about Tennessee, while Norway rats are in the northern states only. In general, a rat can eat up to three times its weight daily because it is a complete eating machine – a true omnivore. Rats will chew on everything from wood, aluminum siding and wallboard to plaster, paneling and concrete. This makes them even more difficult to get rid of even without a food source available.

Rats are a huge enemy of the quality assurance (QA) managers who oversee the cleanliness of these facilities. The more information QA and pest management professionals have before an infestation occurs then the greater chance they'll be able to prevent it.

According to "The Pest Coach" Jeff McGovern, an industry expert known for his pest control consulting business, quality assurance (QA) managers in food processing facilities must work as partners with their pest management counterparts. McGovern says the communication between QA managers and pest professionals allows both to share critical information and – with the proper equipment – allows the in-house manager the opportunity to provide daily checks of pest activity without having to call out the pest technician for another visit.

Prevention is the key to avoiding any infestation and McGovern says QA managers need to look underneath, around, behind and on top of everything in their facility to ensure there are no rats, and no openings for rats to enter. Pest management professionals serving these facilities do this by inspecting under all machinery and in the smallest, tightest areas in a facility.

McGovern's four solutions for battling rats in a food plant are cleaning, sanitizing, doing maintenance, and product rotation. "The solution to pest control is cleaning everything you can see, sanitizing everything you can't see like bacteria, rotating products, and handling maintenance issues, to close openings and fix issues that come up such as leaky pipes," McGovern said.

"Ultimately the building must be absolutely secure because you have auditors from the company as well as third-party inspectors that want to see documentation on what's been done for pest control. That's the QA manager's job and anything he/she can get from the pest professional only aids that person during an audit."

McGovern says many pest professionals rely on the innovative rat control product offerings from Arlington, Texas-based VM Products, an industry leader in solution-based products for the pest control industry. While many companies make traps that catch rats, VM Products is known for its approach to creating better products that make the process of pest control easier and more efficient for the pest control technician.

According to Ethan Vickery, president and co-founder of VM Products, their products are about taking pest control to a new level and helping food processors and other large warehouse-based companies meet audits and quality control quicker and easier.

"When we looked at what needed to be done, we quickly realized the entire way we are protecting for rodents needed to be changed to provide for a better IPM (integrated pest management) approach," said Vickery. "EZ Square™ Rat, EZ Versa, and EZ Snap Seeker are the products that drive that forward."

INNOVATIVE PRODUCT MANUFACTURING

VM Products has three specific solutions that are ideal for protecting food processing and manufacturing facilities from rats. These products provide QA managers with not only preventative options but powerful tools for control.

- **EZ Square™ Rat:** Represents a major shift in pest control technology, this Electronic Rodent Monitoring (ERM) device is a stand-alone Wi-Fi trap system that installs in 60 seconds or less anywhere there's a connection or hotspot. It frees up pest technicians to focus on risk assessments, prevention, and client reinforcement – rather than inspecting non-active devices. It provides a real-time notification of a rodent's behavior, as well as the time and place of the activity. These immediate alerts lead to more efficient responses: identifying and treating before infestations occur or grow.
- **EZ Versa:** It's the first rodent bait station designed for bait, snap traps, and rat-sized glue boards. The EZ Versa is excellent for food processing applications because of the rat-sized glue boards – being able to capture the rat with its body completely inside the station is important. While the glue board will not kill the rodent, rats cannot live without food and water.
- **EZ Seeker:** This product is ideal for a variety of rat challenges. It is designed for attics, drop-down ceilings and other tight spaces – and it can be attached to rodent runways either vertically or horizontally. McGovern says this is best for many food facilities that have small walkways around them ... getting them on the wall instead of on the ground where they can be kicked and damaged is important.

ELECTRONIC RODENT MONITORING

A change document accompanying the 2017 AIB International Consolidated Standards for Inspection revised the rule based on new technologies. Facilities can now choose a frequency of inspections other than weekly based on ERM showing a consistency of performance to monitor for activity, as well as the absence of pest sightings and the facility manager's assessment.

Monitoring, data sharing, and the ability to provide real-time alerts are used to tackle an infestation or as part of a larger IPM program with numerous traps, as needed.

McGovern said another benefit of ERM is that it emphasizes an IPM program, which stresses a non-chemical approach. With ERM, the focus is on monitoring and prevention first and using pest control products second. The use of pesticides is the last step in an IPM approach to pest control.

"This is how you tackle a problem like rats in food processing facilities and beat the problem," McGovern says. "Without innovation, companies would only be reactive in their approach to rat control. VM Products and its solutions help both QA managers and pest professionals focus on monitoring, incorporate data, and get results and data faster."

VM Products' new electronic rodent monitoring system can be set up in 60 seconds or less.

For more information about these innovative solutions, visit www.vmproducts.com.