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- The Rodent Threat Explained
- Preventive Measures Peers Are Using
- Exclusive Research!

20**24**

STATE OF THE

RODENT CONTROL MARKET

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RISKY BUSINESS

Rodents can spread 35 CDC-identified pathogens, leave a trail of brand-damaging evidence behind or cause your operations to shut down completely.

Rodents are public enemy No. 1 for food and beverage processing facilities. They're crafty, crawling with contaminants and a real threat to public health, not to mention brand reputation and a company's ability to operate.

"Cross contamination is a major concern, and any kind of rodent activity in a food or beverage processing facility has broad-sweeping implications that can shut down a facility," said John Harvey, Truly Nolen's commercial division sales manager specializing in quality assurance environments. "If auditing agencies detect any rodent fecal matter, urine or signs of rodent presence, they can stop production, and that is extremely costly."

When asked to rate the pests of most concern in Quality Assurance & Food Safety magazine's 2024 State of the Rodent Market survey, 42% of respondents nailed rodents as the

biggie, followed by 35% for small flies and 23% for cockroaches.

In the rodent family, mice are most worrisome (52%) compared to 16% who say rats are the primary issue.

"Everyone thinks about rats as being the real big deal, but for food processors, the mouse is the greatest threat," said Bobby Corrigan, owner of RMC Pest Management Consulting in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y., and author of "Rodent Control: A Practical Guide for Pest Management Professionals."

Mice can wriggle through minuscule openings, some as small as a quarter of an inch — the width of a pencil eraser.

THE DIRT. Now, some ugly truths that explain why those 28% of respondents who said rodents are not a concern might reconsider.

The CDC lists 35 viruses, parasites and bacterial diseases either directly or indirectly carried by rodents. Some

have innocuous names like Babesiosis with harmful health effects like attacking red blood cells. Tularemia might sound like the name of a Caribbean island, but it triggers a grotesque and possibly life-threatening skin cyst when the bacteria enters the body to do its nasty handiwork. And of course, there's plague.

GOING UP?
Did rodent sightings at your facility increase, decrease or stay the same in 2023 compared with 2022?

| | | |
|--|--|--|
|  9% increased |  55% stayed the same |  36% decreased |
|--|--|--|

Source: Readex Research;
Number of Respondents: 130

None of these inflictions are something you'd want associated with your brand. But rodents present in a food and beverage facility can spread them with impunity.

"Research has shown, in 24 hours, a mouse can put down 3,000 micro-droplets of urine — picture that," Corrigan said. "Now, picture a family unit of seven to 10 mice."

You can smell it.

"A person who is not super familiar with the scent may walk into a storage room and think someone forgot to clean the mop," he said.

During that same 24 hours, a mouse can leave behind upwards of 125 fecal pellets, Corrigan said. (Indeed, the truth is ugly.) "One tiny kernel can hold hundreds of millions of viruses, and that is no exaggeration," he said.

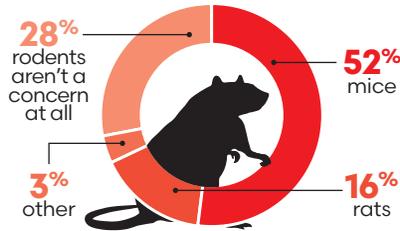
Corrigan is a rodentologist and research scientist steeped in this space, having designed city-wide control programs for the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

"The goal in any facility is 'zero mice,'" Corrigan said. "I tell people, 'Don't underestimate the situation because it's a little mouse. It's a big threat.'"

AWARENESS FOR EVERYONE.

Because food and beverage facilities are often full of nooks and crannies that offer appealing harbors for

RODENT TYPE
What rodents are of most concern at your facility?



Source: Readex Research; Number of Respondents: 130

rodents, efforts to exclude, monitor and control rodents must be persistent and practiced with diligence.

Respondents to QA's rodent survey mostly reported a steady number of rodent sightings (55%) compared to last year, though 9% noticed an increase. Thirty-six percent said rodent sightings decreased.

Mice and rats mostly congregate outside of facilities, which represent 75% of sightings, with other high-pressure spaces including warehouse and storage areas, trash areas and garbage bins, employee break rooms and on incoming goods or in the dock area.

Survey respondents largely reported success with their rodent control programs, with 98% saying, "Yes, our protocols work." Just 2% of participants indicated their facility has no rodent control program in place, underscoring an industry-wide

understanding of the serious risks rodents pose to businesses, their employees and consumers.

Even packaging is a concern.

Damage due to gnawing introduces another layer of risk, said Pat Hottel, technical manager at Rentokil Terminix. "Any physical damage to the integrity of the packaging can result in contamination and open it up to pathogens, including spoilage," she said.

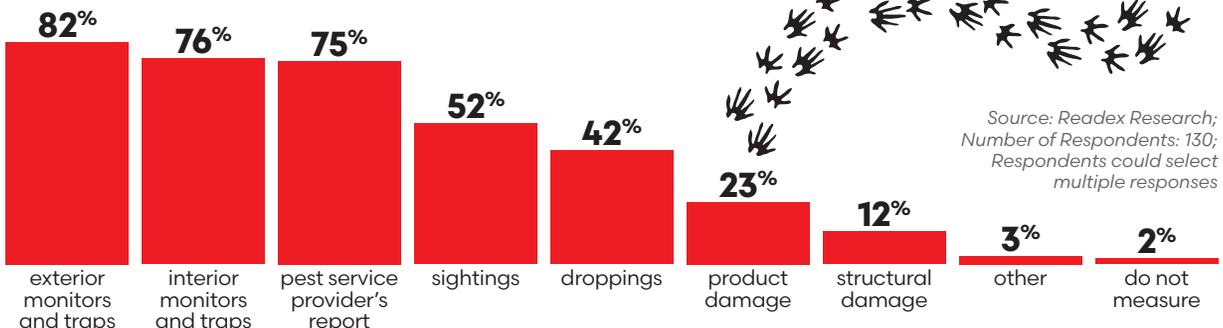
A zero-tolerance rodent and pest policy at Kessler's Food Services in Camp Hill, Pa., is a direct response to the serious nature of these intruders and their potential costly impact. "The culture of our company is to make sure we are keeping all eyes on it," said Quality Assurance Director Amela Romanic.

She notes an increase in exterior rodent activity in summer, and shipments are always a concern. Sightings logs, rigorous and regular inspections, employee training and a thorough prevention and control program have yielded success. There's an always-on-duty approach because Romanic and employees at Kessler's recognize the negative potential.

"We make sure everyone is involved and aware of the risk of rodents and pests," she said. "And we train them on what to look out for so they feel comfortable reporting any sightings." ●

KEEPING TRACK

How is rodent presence at your facility measured?



Source: Readex Research; Number of Respondents: 130; Respondents could select multiple responses

TOOL BELT

There are many effective tools and technologies in place to manage rodents. The key is to marry those with awareness, staff training and engagement in the pest program.

A trailer packed with pallets of product pulled into Kessler’s Food Services in Camp Hill, Pa., and with an inspection checklist in hand, a receiving team conducted the multipoint audit — a required precursor to welcoming any supplies or materials into the loading dock.

“The one trailer that came in, we could see that it was not very clean,” said Quality Assurance Director Amela Romanic. “There was loose dirt, almost like they had been delivering garden items first. We said, ‘Sorry, we cannot accept this product with the trailer in that condition,’ and the driver had to take it back.”

A concerted effort at Kessler’s Food Services to provide tools and education so employees keep a trained eye on the facility for pests informs through company-wide protocols.

Small group training occurs monthly and includes walking the facility to point out areas to watch. A log is available to record sightings. In-house inspections are combined with those performed by a pest management provider. Even basics like keeping doors closed are regular reminders.

Employee education is a critical component to control. More eyes mean less room for error.



“We are very strict about our house rules,” said Chris Dodson, QA manager and SQF practitioner at Atkinson Candy Company in Lufkin, Texas.

Atkinson Candy also maintains a sightings log, and Dodson emphasizes the importance of including specifics. “I’ve been drilling the team with the need for details,” she said. “Don’t just write [down that] you saw signs of a pest in the kitchen, which is 50-by-40 feet and has an upstairs. Say, ‘I saw it in the caramel kitchen by the third cooker against the wall.’”

The 1957-built facility in east Texas is located close to a wooded area and creek. “We have sweet stuff, so [rodents] like to come and visit,” she said. “But we have not had one inside.”

Since joining the company in November 2023, Dodson has only spotted one rodent outdoors. “It participated in the treatment in the bait and laid down and died outside of the box,” she said.

Dodson has been in the food processing industry for 49 years and recognizes that rodent monitoring and best practices require a multi-pronged approach and all-in attitude.

“Employee engagement is key,” she said. “See something, say something.”

PREVENT PATHS What preventive measures, if any, are taken at your facility against rodent entry/presence?



Source: Readex Research; Number of Respondents: 130; Respondents could select multiple responses

2024 STATE OF THE RODENT CONTROL MARKET

LAYERS OF OPPORTUNITY. Understanding the mechanics of a facility is the key to effective monitoring and control, said John Harvey, commercial sales division manager at Truly Nolen, where he serves large-scale food and beverage accounts.

From environmental impacts to a facility's structure, initial assessment visits begin with a walking tour to identify potential points that could introduce a rodent problem. Receiving areas with rollup doors, food storage spaces, trash receptacles, break rooms — these are some hot spots Harvey identified.

"Dumpsters are a big, conducive area for rodent activity," he said, noting that Truly Nolen works with facilities' sanitation partners to ensure proper bin positioning to reduce the potential for rodent activity. "If there is a dumpster corral 25 feet from the building, let's get that across the parking lot, and then we make recommendations in terms of treating the dumpster."

Bobby Corrigan said weekly "pilot's walks" through key areas of a facility are essential. "You can't say, 'I'm busy.' Everyone is busy, and with that attitude of, 'I have a person who takes care of this,' that is where situations go south," said the owner of RMC Pest Management Consulting in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y. "There is no shortage of really effective tools when used correctly, but nothing beats preventive inspections."

COVERING ALL THE BASES. Harvey agreed, "We have more at our disposal now than historically to combat the problems."

He cites an uptick in repellents that when married to a traditional program with traps and bait stations can prevent rodent entry. Namely, an exterior liquid repellent barrier treatment offers a layer of protection in conjunction with bait stations, strategically placed every 50 feet along a building's exterior, especially in high-density areas like receiving zones.

"In conjunction with that, we include an interior program with mechanical traps on either side of all doorways," Harvey said, noting that rodents like to run along walls "because they feel safe."

Truly Nolen offers its commercial customers a program that includes rodent bait stations with Bluetooth capabilities. The system links to its customer portal, providing complete transparency, Harvey said.

"We set up the remote stations around the property in zones, and when technicians arrive, they activate the Bluetooth and can see any activity that occurred in those bait stations," Harvey said. "This helps with our response time, and when we give that feedback to clients, we can provide real-time data points and identify areas where we need to bolster our resolve."

While 52% of QA rodent survey respondents said they are familiar with remote monitoring, just 20% of participants reported implementing electronic monitoring. Most said the reason for not using it is because their current rodent control measures are sufficient, and 39% said their pest management provider did not suggest this solution.

Ultimately, remote monitors are the canary in the coal mine, Corrigan said. "You need both," he said of pairing remote monitoring with human intervention.

Electronic devices do not stand alone effectively.

Remote monitoring can inform a collaborative pest program, but Corrigan said the technology hasn't taken off like he expected when it came on the scene. "I was the first scientist on board to say, 'This is a game change for our industry,' but that has not really happened," he said, citing cost as one barrier.

Rentokil Terminix Technical Director Pat Hottel agrees that remote moni-

toring did not spread like she initially predicted. "That doesn't mean it won't," she said, adding that there is opportunity as facilities increasingly adopt automation and robotic lines where technicians cannot easily inspect due to safety concerns.

EXCLUSION, INCLUSION & MORE.

Hottel also emphasizes exclusion as imperative to a facility's pest management program. This includes checking door seals and any gaps that are a welcome sign for rodents.

Additionally, fumigation is another preventive measure against rodent entry and presence in a food facility, according to 7% of survey respondents. In fact, 20% of those surveyed said fumigation options have been implemented at their facilities.

Dodson said a logbook helps inform repairs, as well. "Rodents can go up through pipes and they are very good at finding areas around insulation, so we watch those carefully," she said, noting that their facility includes a connected pipe that runs across the parking lot to where sugar and corn syrup is stored. "We make sure that is very well sealed so there is no place for any 'friends' to come in."

All this circles back to training, and facilities can work with their pest management professionals to deliver education to employees. "We offer semi-annual pest identification and sanitation training where we talk about how to create a better environment," Harvey said, noting that these sessions go over regular walkthroughs and pest management recommendations to help create a culture of awareness.

"The key to prevention is good standard operating procedures (SOPs) so staff is well aware of how to prevent rodents or report a concern," he said. ●





BETTER TOGETHER

Pest management providers can be a partner in preventing rodent pressure in facilities. All you have to do is participate.

Every week, Atkinson Candy Company's pest management partner inspects the facility and performs a walk through with QA Manager Chris Dodson.

"He reviews our pest sightings log and we discuss anything new employees noticed," she said, relating that managing pest pressure is a reality of doing business in Lufkin, Texas, where the company is based. The operative word, Dodson notes, is "partner."

A collaborative approach with open communication has resulted in a highly successful pest management program for Atkinson Candy.

"Our technician does a super job of walking the plant, pointing out anything he might observe that we didn't see, like a crack in the wall or a new crevice, and our maintenance team is right on it," Dodson said.

Bobby Corrigan underscores the importance of carving out time during a technician's regular inspection and walk through to engage in the process. "And before the technician leaves, sit down for just five minutes and ask, 'Tell me what you found? Tell me what you saw? Tell me what I need to do to help you maintain control?'" said the owner of RMC Pest

Management Consulting in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y.

When QA managers or facility supervisors simply ask for the service ticket to sign off, they're leaving on the table a whole lot of opportunity to secure their environment.

DON'T SWEAT THE COST. When cost is the only factor driving pest management decisions, there's trouble.

"I remind food companies, 'You tell me how much it will cost you to be on TikTok or have the FDA shut you down because that animal was in a place you didn't know about and

WORKING OUT

Do you feel your facility's rodent control program has been successful?

| | |
|--|--|
| <p style="color: white; font-weight: bold;">YES</p> <p style="color: red; font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">98%</p> | <p style="color: white; font-weight: bold;">NO</p> <p style="color: red; font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">1%</p> |
|--|--|

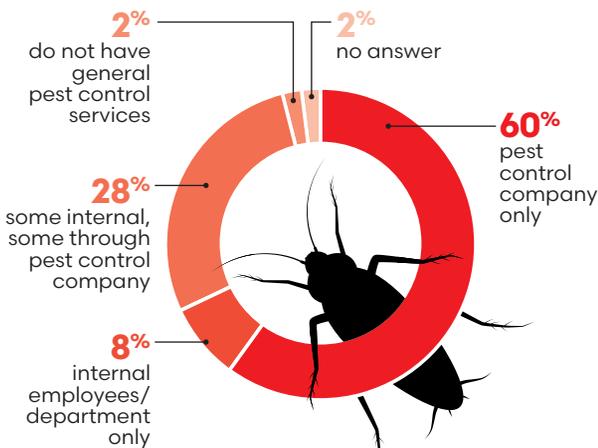
facility does not have a program

2%

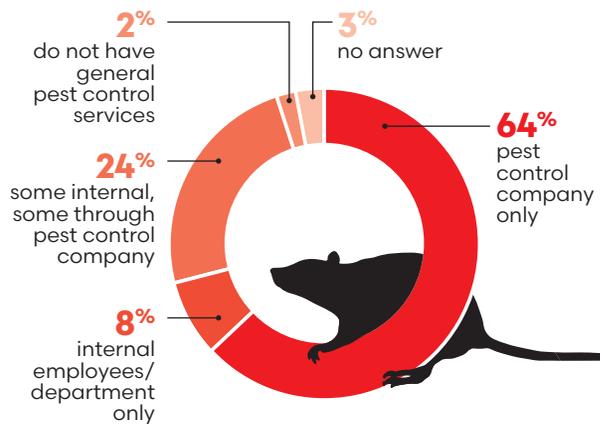
Source: Readex Research; Number of Respondents: 130

SERVICE PROVIDER

Who provides your facility with general pest control services?



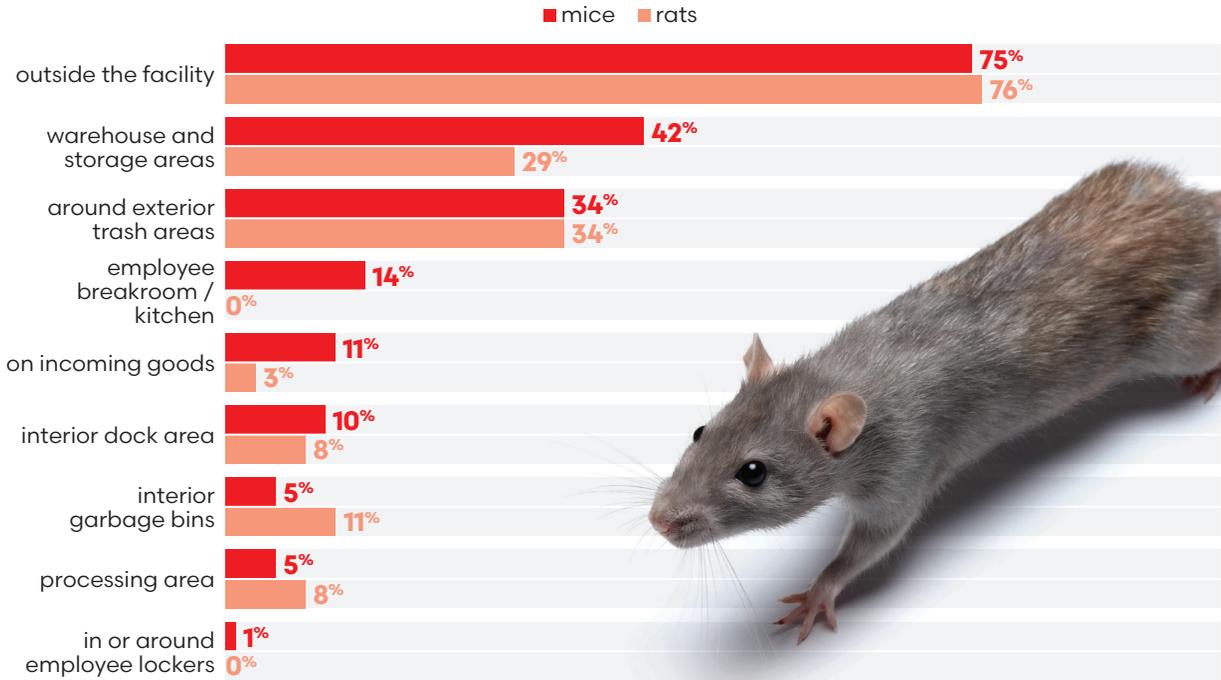
Who provides your facility with rodent control services?



Source: Readex Research; Number of Respondents: 130

IN SIGHT

Where have mice and rats been seen at your facility?



Source: Readex Research; Number of Respondents: 130; Respondents could select multiple responses



defecated on your product and it went out for delivery,” Corrigan said. “Food safety should be expensive. That is not where you want to worry about saving a couple thousand dollars a year.”

LEVERAGE RESOURCES. A pest management provider can be a go-to for more than prevention, control and training. When exclusion work is required, such as door repairs or sealing, some providers offer this service — or can refer facilities to partner contractors, said Pat Hottel, technical director for Rentokil Terminix.

“Take advantage of those resources, because sometimes it can be hard to get a contractor out there to do the work,” she said. “Look to your pest management provider for that advice and help in getting repairs done.”

Leverage communications tools, as well. For instance, every week, Amela Romanic logs into the customer

portal her pest control provider offers. “I can see trending reports and find out if there are certain months or times of year or areas that we need to keep an eye on,” said the quality assurance director for Kessler’s Food Services in Camp Hill, Pa.

Their conversations are fluid. “A key to success has been the ease in contacting them whenever we

have an issue, and they are quick to respond,” Romanic said, adding that the company reviews sightings logs and recommends adjustments. This, plus the portal, have “helped tremendously,” she said.

“The more information I can get my hands on to see how we can increase or better control rodents, the better,” Romanic said. ●

about the survey

Sponsored by Douglas Products, QA’s 2024 State of the Market Report: Rodent Control in Food Facilities survey was conducted by Readex Research, a privately held research firm in Stillwater, Minn. The April 30–May 21, 2024, survey sample of food and beverage processing facility managers and executives was systematically selected from the circulation file of Quality Assurance & Food Safety (QA). Data was collected from 173 recipients of QA’s digital magazine and/or e-newsletter at unique U.S. company locations. Of these, 130 work for a company with at least one food/beverage facility and are the basis of this report. The margin of error for percentages is ±8.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Specific results may not add up to 100% due to rounding or the ability to select multiple responses.



IT'S TIME TO TALK ABOUT THE F-WORD

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