Prevent pest infestations and maintain impeccable hygiene in your factory

Any establishment in which food is stored or processed needs to maintain the highest level of hygiene possible in order to ensure food safety and comply with legislation.

Staying pest-free can be a challenge for the food manufacturing industry as these premises contain an abundance of food, shelter and warmth.

Food production facilities also produce high amounts of waste, making them both attractive to pests and ideal for microbial activity.

by David Cross,
Head of the Technical Training Academy,
Rentokil Pest Control
and Luke Rutterford, Technical Manager,
Rentokil Specialist Hygiene.
www.rentokil.com

It is always best to have a proactive pest control strategy in place to ensure that any pest problem is identified as early as possible, making it easier to contain and treat. This article explores how employees are important to any proactive pest control strategy, providing an army of eyes and ears around a factory able to spot the signs of a pest problem.

It is recommended that food processing or storing facilities have a deep clean at least twice a year to make sure that the highest standards of hygiene are practiced. In the latter half of this article we will investigate what this involves.

Employee awareness training

In days gone by, employees would have been sent out of the factory on a pest awareness training course. Now online learning platforms are an increasingly popular method of educating employees; the benefit being that they can be accessed on demand and remotely, helping to make additional studying more cost-effective and beneficial.

One such training programme is myLearning, Rentokil Pest Control's interactive online platform designed to help food manufacturers train their employees on the importance of pest control within their business.

By investing in such courses, businesses can ensure employees know the signs to look out for, reducing the likelihood of an infestation taking hold.

These are designed to help employees understand pest behaviour, and how an untreated pest problem can escalate.

Employees are asked to complete four different modules, helping them to become useful support mechanisms in the fight to keep pests at bay.

Legislation

There are several long-standing acts in place that businesses and staff need to be aware of when it comes to pest control. For example, the Food Safety Act 1990 (concerned with food quality) and Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 (obligations to control pests).

The General Food Hygiene Regulations 2006 provides the main provisions around the legal requirements for the safe production of food.

It states that premises should be designed so that they enable cleaning and the proper removal of waste. It also says that as far as is practicable, entry of birds and any risk of infestation by rodents and insects must be prevented.

Damage

Employees should be able to recognise different types of damage caused by pests. For example, rodents can gnaw through electrical cables, water pipes and even structural supports.

In the most serious of cases this poses a fire hazard. Birds, such as gulls and pigeons, can also cause indirect damage by building nests in guttering, resulting in water ingress and flooding.

Insects, rodents and birds will also damage food just by feeding on it, while rodents can destroy packaging by shredding it for nesting material.

Contamination and disease

It is important that employees are aware of the health risks that come with pests in the premises.

Contamination can occur in the form of droppings, urine, fur, feathers and even the bodies of the pests themselves found within a facility.

Pests transport bacteria, viruses, parasites and fungal spores as they go from one food source to the other.

These pests also have the ability to pass these onto humans by regurgitating their stomach contents onto food while they are feeding.

Continued on page 14

Continued from page 13

● **Reputational damage**

Finally, employees should recognise the costs of an infestation to their employer's brand image and its potential to reduce sales.

Reacting to an infestation is expensive and it is therefore much more cost effective to maintain a pest control strategy throughout the year.

Educating your company's front line workers with the knowledge to recognise the tell-tale signs of pest infestations will start the process for its remediation.

However, expert pest controllers should also be used to maintain a connected set of monitor and alert systems to optimise your business' defence against pests.

The fight against grime

Cleaning is an important aspect of active pest control and part of any firm's hygiene responsibilities. Food waste and other debris can be regularly found in the corners of buildings, machinery or hard to reach places and can develop microbial activity if routine cleaning is not effectively executed. Microbial growth in a food environment is not only hazardous, but it is also attractive to pests.

However, daily cleaning alone will not

eliminate all build-up of grime and pathogenic bacteria and most food factories will need an expert supplier to comprehensively inspect and then carry out a full deep clean in their facilities.

In an ideal situation a critical appraisal of the cleaning system should be undertaken, wherein frequency of cleaning and the hazard analysis and critical control points plan (HACCP) should be reviewed.

In this process it is often wise to use ATP (Adenosine Triphosphate) or in some cases microbiological swabbing to validate the cleaning efficiency and to identify areas of improvement.

Systematic contour mapping of the site can often indicate key areas of process that may need attention. Considerations of an expert cleaner include using the most appropriate tool for the job and that includes the chemicals and the processes.

Once a site has been refreshed by an intensive deep clean, it will form a standard that should then be maintained by the regular cleaning staff.

Expert disinfection equipment

Once the site is deep cleaned, Ultra Low Volume (ULV) disinfectant fogging can be used to sanitise food production areas and process equipment.

Fogging is a technique which enables treatment of large areas in a short space of time. The disinfectant generates a visible fog formed of tiny droplets, measuring 5-50 microns in diameter.

Studies show application by ULV significantly reduces the number of potentially harmful pathogens, by treating the surfaces and even deactivating some airborne microbes. Using advanced decontamination and cleaning techniques, areas can be safely cleaned to the high standard that food manufacturing governing bodies expect.

Final words

Better understanding and implementation of prevention methods will save businesses time and money when dealing with pest infestations and their associated risks.

Get in touch with a pest control expert or specialist hygiene technician if you are unaware of how your business might be responsible for pest infestations, or if your facility is in need of a deep clean. ■