



## *Quality Food Analysis, Consultation & Training Services, LLC*

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### January 2008: Year of the Rat

The rat is the first animal in the 12-year cycle of the Chinese lunar calendar. It is also very auspicious to be born in the year of the rat. Unfortunately, the presence of rats in restaurants and food facilities is not auspicious. They could lead to the closure of a food facility by the health department. Rats and mice spread disease, whether or not they are alive. They can also spread diseases such as Salmonella spp. and E-coli through contaminating the food with urine and droppings. Rodents have also been known to start fires by gnawing on electric wires. The gnawing is also the cause of food being damaged.

Evidence of rodents can be seen through the visual observation of a mouse or rats, rodent droppings, and rub marks. Rub marks are the grease from the rat's body that is left behind on the wall or ceiling as the rat runs along the wall. In order to see the rub marks better, the ceilings and walls should be painted a light color. In some cases, the rodents may burrow and create holes in the shelves, walls, and ceilings. Although restaurants can conduct some level of pest control on their own, most states have some type of regulation that restricts what a restaurant can do without the assistance from a licensed pest control operator. The restrictions are to prevent pesticide contamination of food, equipment and utensils, and other food contact surfaces.

Have you ever read the labels on the pesticides used for rodents, cockroaches, flies and other insects? Do not use chemicals that are not labeled for use in commercial kitchens or food preparation areas because there is a possibility that the chemical can contaminate the food, equipment, or food contact surface, and can make someone very sick. Reading the label is also important to make sure the chemical is applied properly.

If a licensed pest control operator is hired, remember that pest control operator is trained to eliminate the rodent problem. They are usually not familiar with the food safety regulations, so it is the responsibility of the owner or manager to make sure the pest control operator is not applying the chemicals incorrectly. The application of rodenticides is only one part of a multi-part program to control and minimize rodent problems in the food facility. It is important to establish an Integrated Pest Management System (IPM).

According to the US EPA, IPM is an effective, economic, and environmentally friendly way to deal with pest management. IPM look at the life cycles of pests and their interactions with the environment. IPM also is recommended by the US EPA because it minimizes the use of chemical pesticides and limits possible chemical hazards to people, property, and the environment.

It is important to first understand a pests' needs and how they live. Pests look for habitats that provide air, moisture, food, and shelter. Pest populations can be controlled by removing some of these basic elements or prevented by simply blocking their access into the building.

The first step to IPM is to check the building and block all access areas. Look under the exterior doors, the roof, area around the windows and vents. Please remember that an opening the size of a width of a pencil would be enough for a mouse to enter your facility. For flies and other flying insects, make sure all your exterior doors have air curtains and check to make sure that the air is blowing out towards the exterior. If the air is blowing into the building, it defeats the purpose of having an air curtain because the insects would be pulled in with the wind. The air is supposed to keep the insects out.

The second step to IPM is to eliminate all habitable areas within your facility. Check dark moist areas, such as the area around and behind the water heater, under the kitchen sink and dishwasher, spaces behind the walk-in refrigerator or freezer, and any other area where you do not clean or inspect on a daily basis. With fruit flies, check and regularly clean the area around the soda syrups and inside the floor drains. Remember, flies and fruit flies can go from egg to adult in about a week, so general cleaning is recommended more frequently than once a week.

Once you block entry by pests and eliminate all habitable areas, the third step of IPM is to apply pesticides. Make sure a licensed pest control operator is used to apply pesticides.

Five minutes a day of staff training would make all the difference. Why don't you try various methods to incorporate training into your work day? If you have any questions regarding sanitation or food safety, or require additional information regarding staff training, please feel free to e-mail us.