

Getting pest control right – finding and managing a pest control contractor

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In considering the appointment of a pest control contractor, food hygiene professionals need to invest time to ensure that the chosen supplier meets a range of key criteria, from a legal, corporate and professional perspective.

As a food manufacturer, your supplier's responsibility is to protect your business against the wide range of risks and problems that pest issues can cause. Ultimately your organisation's reputation and brand is at stake. With this in mind, you must have full confidence in the range of services your contractor offers, their expertise in identifying pest related risk and first rate customer service.

Make an informed decision

At Rentokil we always recommend that when hiring a pest control contractor, companies should follow a considered process with various stages of short-listing.

This approach will result in a long term prevention and should avoid the necessity of having to respond to an infestation as a matter of urgency.

The urgency is usually brought about by unwelcome contamination or regulatory inspection and you will need to react immediately. In this case your decision will be based on a supplier's own reputation, word of mouth or a quick Google search.

However, we would recommend that the primary objective is to establish and maintain a productive, long term relationship between you the customer and your pest control company and its technicians.

Over time this close professional relationship will reap the benefits of an intimate knowledge of the chal-

lenges unique to the company, its products and its sites. This kind of relationship usually prevents any emergencies occurring.

To get to this point, we recommend that you fully understand two crucial factors before appointing a contractor. The first of these is the legal implications of hiring a pest control company and the second is the specifications of the subsequent contract with that controller.

Legal considerations fall into two categories – due diligence and pesticide legislation.

If you are responsible for managing a pest control contract, you should still be sufficiently familiar with the pests, their biology and the appropriate control procedures that will ensure they can be prevented and/or eradicated.

Although your contractors will have all the expertise necessary to diligently complete their task you should still equip yourself with as much knowledge as possible about pests. This will strengthen your company's pest control because you are on-site all the time.

The use of a competent pest control contractor will reduce your risks of infestation to a considerable degree but in the event of any pest related offences being brought against your company your due diligence defence would be strengthened by your efforts to be informed and proactive.

Secondly, being familiar with UK pesticide legislation is essential to the food manufacturer because it defines the circumstances in which pest control measures can be undertaken; notably to conserve or protect

food stocks or to prevent the spread of disease. It also aims to protect people and animals from harm by restricting the

use of toxic substances, preventing unnecessary killing and prohibiting inhumane control techniques.

You need to adhere to key guidelines to ensure that your contractor is using pesticides safely. This can include minimising pesticide use by substituting pesticides with non-chemical control options, for example cleaning or proofing or using the safest appropriate method; and performing a risk assessment based on the products being used under the Management of Health and Safety Regulations at Work Act 1992 and the Control of Pesticide Regulations 1986.

Other considerations are only using HSE approved pesticides on-site and ensuring a Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations assessment has been completed for all chemicals.

As the person responsible for food hygiene in your organisation, you need to be fully aware of current legislation to ensure, to the best of your knowledge, that contractors are compliant.

Sourcing the contractor

You have a range of options when sourcing candidates for a pest control contract, including seeking recommendations from another business, Trade Associations, such as the British Pest Control Association and The National Pest Technicians Association, or your own research through trade publications, the internet or Yellow Pages.

Market leading providers such as Rentokil use their larger marketing budgets to good effect and they may be the first provider that comes to mind. That said, we would be the first to say that we may not be the right pest control supplier for all businesses. Small organisations may feel a better cultural fit with similar sized suppliers. However, if you have a large site with many infestation issues, you may require the broad experience and technical resources of a larger company. Pests pose a threat to

businesses in the food industry – no matter what their size – so a rapid response and on-demand callout services at all times is crucial. The locally based company should be able to do this, and it is one of the reasons why Rentokil operates from local offices across the country. This means that we can deliver that kind of rapid response, but with the back-up of a national team of field biologists, entomologists and zoologists.

When short-listing potential suppliers, be they large or small, do look out for approval qualities like Trade Association membership, Public and Products Liability insurance, and the evidence of financial stability together with trading history.

There should also be evidence of professional training at all levels of the company not just in pest control but also in the necessary Health and Safety and environmental policies.

Get client references and take a close look at the standard of their quality management systems. Pest control is a vital business investment and you need to be sure you are getting the best service the industry has to offer.

What to expect

Once your pest control contract short-list is in place, consider commissioning a pre-tender survey from every candidate.

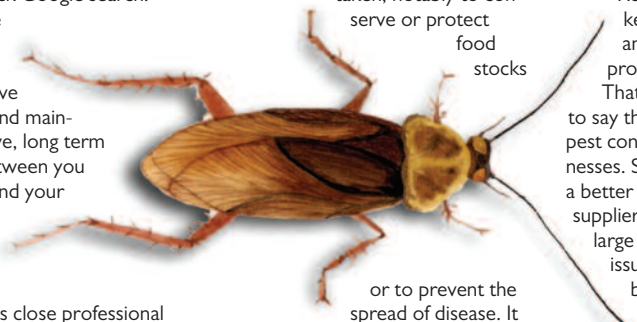
The responses will help you better understand the efficiency, professionalism and comparative prices of each one.

A very telling factor is how much knowledge the potential contractor has gained of the site, after one visit.

Have they accurately understood the individual requirements of your business? Have they spotted potential infestation risks? Are you comfortable with their assessment and proposed solution?

The tender stage is a good time to get a sense of how well your contractor has addressed and will continue to answer these questions.

This process will also offer you a
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fuller picture of what you can expect your prospective contractor to offer as part of the contract.

For example, the Rentokil Pest Control Service includes:

- Comprehensive and regular site inspections and identification of pest problems and the potential risks they pose.
- Detailed reports of every visit including observations, notes of treatments carried out and recommended action.
- Overall site risk assessment.
- Compliance with applicable legislation.
- Unlimited emergency call-outs.
- Free surveys and quotes as your contract progresses and your requirements change.
- Site checklists.

This may seem extensive but, in our experience, the above components form the basis of a full and efficient pest control offer.

Ensuring your pest control contract positively includes all these elements, gives you the peace of mind that you are protecting your business as far as possible.

Reputation is another factor to consider in your decision process and, again, this can vary on a case by case basis depending on your corporate values and priorities.

What value do you place on working with market leaders? Will their awareness and interest in innovation bring a positive dimension to the service they offer?

Will the combination of pest research, risk management strategies and specialist products with the latest pest control technology and service models deliver to you effective pest control solutions? This is vital for our larger clients because they value being ahead of new developments, being able to combat new pest issues as and when they arise and, above all, being ahead of the possibility of that unexpected challenge.

What if someone developed a new heat treatment for tackling insect infestations without the need for chemicals? That is one of the benefits of using a company like Rentokil with its recent development of Entotherm Heat Treatment that does precisely this.

Effective management

Once your contract supplier is in place take the time to make it work for you. Build that trust with them that comes from the delivery of a reliable customer service that supports your business objectives.

As already mentioned, a pest control contract requires investment and, as such, we recommend maximising the return by signing your supplier up for a



Bait box inspection is an essential part of pest control management.

minimum of one year (with a break clause) to give your organisation vital continuity and protection.

When you manage a pest control contract, it is always good practice to write your own specifications; you know your business best.

Each company will have very different needs so one can not compile a single contract specification to suit everyone.

All infestations in food areas are unacceptable, but a food company's pest control contract can cover areas of lesser specification that do not involve food.

On these sites you can deal with infestations as they arise or reach an unacceptable level. Different buildings on your site may also require different levels of pest protection, for example outbuildings or redundant machinery stores need less protection than food stores.

Rentokil recommends building the following specifications into your contract:

- Be absolutely clear on which species of pest the contract covers. Use the scientific name of the species to avoid any confusion or inappropriate eradication of a similar species. If the contractor finds a new pest which relates to your business, it should require renegotiation of the contract and further research before this becomes included in the specification.

- There are so many varieties of stored product pests; it is sometimes advisable to use a term like 'other species infesting stored and processed food commodities' to make sure that they are all covered.

- Mark a time period over which you would like eradication or control to be completed for each species.

- There are some pests like flies which you can do a lot to control yourself and good hygiene and frequent refuse collection are very important. However, effective fly control units, which are regularly serviced, are another key element in preventing fly problems.

- There are several additional pest control qualifications of which you should build into your contract. These include: two years' relevant practical experience, a basic Food Hygiene certificate, membership of PROMPT (the pest control industry CPD scheme) and a Food and Drink Safety Passport.

- Detail the frequency of routine, follow-up and call out inspections. Call out inspections can very quickly turn into costly routine inspections, so monitor them closely to see if they are really needed.

- Ensure that you have a system to record the numbers of pests eradicated in different areas of your premises. More and more, people prefer to have information recorded electronically, so that they can access it from wherever they are.

Rentokil's PestNetOnline system reports all visits, pest activity and recommendations, and allows analysis of pest trends.

- Write forms detailing pesticide usage broken down by trade name, active ingredient, quantity used and area of use.

- Set up an informal reporting system where staff and your contractor

can report pest sightings by date and nature.

- The contract should be for a period of at least one year. The terms for notice periods and cancellation on the part of both contractor and client should be defined. Three months notice is often a common clause.

- Payment terms should be specified. Pest control contracts are usually billed in advance with a three month period being the usual period.

Monitoring and QA

Your contractor should share your own aim; to prevent and control pest issues within your business. Ongoing monitoring will support this, possibly through Quality Assurance checks.

These are mostly done through technical inspections conducted by an independent senior technician or field biologist who will produce a detailed report highlighting any issues which might arise.

Rentokil has in-house support from technical inspectors built into the contract to help deliver this element of the service.

For a more thorough assessment of performance, consider making and documenting spot checks by the contract manager and members of staff on site. These evaluations, performed at different times of the day, in different weather conditions and different areas of a site, can be crucial in determining the success or failure of eradicating a pest.

We recommend regular review meetings with your contractor. These will be based around factors such as any customer complaints about pests, the contractor's attendance record, pest control documentation, infestation status, corrective actions undertaken, for example hygiene, proofing, traps or proposals for additional action in the coming months.

As you would with other suppliers, document all contact with the pest control contractor and all checks on their work. This helps to avoid misunderstanding and provides regular feedback to the contractor so they can continue to improve their service.

I believe that people needing pest control should be free to focus on the business of running their business. There are various expert suppliers helping organisations like yours so that you can free up time and resources to focus upon producing wholesome and safe food and drink.

By taking time to find the right pest control contractor, whose expertise and professionalism you fully trust, the risks and problems pests can have on your business can be drastically reduced. ■

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