

Limiting products, real-time data and innovation: What the UK's pest control trends mean for facilities managers

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John Stewart and Sophie Thorogood, technical training managers at [Pelsis Group](#), provide an overview of the trends shaping pest control today.

Pest management is an essential service requirement for many businesses, ensuring that human health is protected in many different sectors around the UK, from food production to hospitality and healthcare.

The UK is primarily focused on rodent management. Rats and mice thrive all year round in a temperate climate and in winter, so businesses and homes have the continual threat of rodent infestation as they seek harbourage and food.

Due to this threat, there is a proactive rather than reactive push in pest management, which focuses on ensuring there is a high standard of building maintenance to prevent pest entry, and cleanliness to restrict the availability of food.

Use of rodenticides

In line with other industries, there is a continuing trend to promote greener ways of managing pests that have a limited, less harmful effect on wildlife and the environment.

Therefore, the safe use of rodenticides has become a top priority in the industry after there were highlighted concerns about anticoagulant residues entering the food chain and leading to non-target poisoning. This has led to UK pest technicians being more rigorously examined and scrutinised in the last

five years than ever before and the industry becoming collectively more knowledgeable and specialist.

Along with this, the application of rodenticides has become more restricted. There have been label changes to prevent the use of higher toxicity anticoagulants in some outdoor spaces, again to protect wildlife.

However, this fails to consider that there is a growing concern over rodent resistance to anticoagulants. Without using higher toxicity rodenticides, resistant populations of rodents are never effectively controlled. This promotes resistance, as susceptible rodents will still be managed.

Meanwhile, resistant rodents will continually feed on rodenticides and not succumb to the lethal effects, thereby altering the population dynamics.

Limited products

There is an ongoing squeeze on the technician's toolkit as more products are no longer approved for use, due to either environmental or humanness concerns.

A prime example is the insecticides available to use. While it has been necessary to remove classes of insecticides, this has resulted in technicians having to rely on one class, which makes rotation of insecticides to avert resistance occurring impossible.

Additionally, the use of glueboards is currently set to be banned in Wales and possibly Scotland, over fears about humanness in their use and non-target catching.

Movement of pests

Over lockdown, there was a shift of pest locality from urban city centres to the suburbs, as the food sources available in the city became scarce. Furthermore, many pest technicians were not able to gain access to these locations as pest management was not initially considered an essential service.

With this in mind, many infestations were not managed correctly, leading to a rising number of rodents in domestic locations and rapid reinvasion of city areas once normal life resumed.

We are fast approaching winter and with local authority strikes affecting refuse collection, the rodent population will further increase. This will inevitably place pressure on buildings and businesses, leading to structural damage, loss of stock, disease transmission and loss of earnings.

Pest management will evolve through technology

New technology is one of the ways the pest management industry will evolve and combat the many pressures it faces. Technology will lead to earlier detection of pests, allowing for a more proactive pest management approach and for smaller and more focused application of pesticides.

Additionally, technology will give site owners more visibility of pest activity and management. As people wish to track more and have more information at their disposal, there will be a shift to having live and current feedback on their pest management. This demands that technicians be more technologically savvy and place emphasis on why their expertise is needed.

While a technologically advanced counting system will be useful in the industry, it will be redundant if not placed in the correct location and the most effective management is not used. Hence, while large datasets will be easier to create, data in itself is useless without pest expertise to interpret and make sense of it.

Customers want visibility of what is happening on their sites. Digital platforms allow FM companies to keep track of the number of visits sites are receiving, the number and types of infestations, and the products that are being used on site.

They can also receive data on the speed that callouts are attended and how quickly infestations are resolved, as well as recommendations regarding site hygiene, building fabrication defects, and issues with refuse collection and landscaping that may facilitate pest proliferation.

High-quality pest control services

Customers employing FM companies to provide pest control services expect a high standard of service from them. Pest control companies that are members of the British Pest Control Association (BPCA) or National Pest Technicians Association (NPTA) must meet certain criteria to become members and remain members.

For example, all servicing technicians must enrol on a continuous personal development scheme. The schemes ensure that pest control technicians are keeping up to date with industry best practices, health and safety, legislation and biology, and behaviour and control methods for pest species.

As a pest control industry, we should always look for greener, more sustainable methods of controlling pests to minimise the impact on the environment and non-target species. The use of environmental management, temperature-controlled treatments, repellents, natural chemicals, parasitoids, and mechanical methods of control should always be considered first.

Investing in technology and operators to improve pest management

Proactive pest management is required to promote customer satisfaction. The recommendations that are given to the client as part of the pest inspection are fundamental for maintaining a pest-free premises.

The digitisation of pest control devices will allow trained, skilled PCOs (pest control operators) to focus more on the root cause of infestations rather than simply being distracted with checking and dating bait stations. This further allows technicians time to inspect for building fabrication issues, housekeeping and external influences.