Close the Door to Winter Intruders

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How secure is your facility from pests? The intruders you should be worried about this winter -- mice and rats -- can slip through holes as small as coins. As the weather cools, rodents seek the warmth, food and water that food manufacturing facilities provide. Once inside, mice and rats are more than just a nuisance; they pose both a health hazard and a safety issue.

Rodents can contaminate your product, spread diseases, such as salmonella and E. coli, and put your third-party audit and facility at risk. When you consider that one pair of mice may produce 200 offspring in four months, it’s easy to see how a rodent problem can quickly spiral out of control.

Rodents can gain access to your building in a variety of ways due to their ability to climb, run along pipes and wires, and jump down distances of 8 feet. They will use branches as a bridge to your facility and scurry through overgrown landscaping into holes you may not know exist. Rodents can also ride in on crates and pallets, and can enter your building through doors that are left open.

The good news is you can help protect your establishment and your bottom line by rodent-proofing your facility in just a few short steps:

1. **Establish an integrated pest management (IPM) program.** Preventive, effective and long-term IPM programs focus on sanitation and facility maintenance to reduce the food, water and shelter sources pests seek. By turning to preventive measures first, IPM also reduces the need for chemical use.
2. **Inspect the outside of your facility for any entry points.** Ask your maintenance crew to seal up holes with a water-proof sealant, and use copper or steel wool for an extra layer of protection. Concentrate on potential points of entry for rodents, such as the areas around utility penetrations.
3. **Reduce potential food sources inside your facility.** Employee break rooms should be clear of any food remnants and garbage cans with food and other waste need to be kept tightly sealed. On the plant floor, clean drains and equipment with an organic cleaner to eliminate the residue that pests can feed on. Facility maintenance staff should pay particular attention to HVAC units, which are a common culprit for providing pests with water. Monitor for spills and clean them immediately, as pests only need a small amount of moisture to survive. Keep your returns area clean and inspect all returned products so those infested will not contaminate the plant.
4. **Inspect incoming raw materials, packaging and truck trailers for signs of infestation.** When you are not receiving materials, keep loading bay doors closed.

5. **Involve your employees.** Educate your staff on the pests themselves, as well as the conditions that attract them, and encourage your employees to report any signs of problems. Utilize a reputable pest management company to provide your employees with this training.
6. **Monitor for infestation signs.** If you spot any of the following signs, call your pest management company immediately:

- Droppings. A strong indicator of an infestation is visible rodent droppings. Mouse droppings are about the size of a grain of rice, and rat droppings are the size of a raisin. These droppings carry harmful bacteria, diseases and viruses, and should be removed by a professional pest management company.
- Gnaw marks. Mice and rats love to gnaw on everything from wood and paper to dry wall and wires. Since rodents can chew through small openings, be sure to inspect any areas in the building that appear to be chewed or gnawed, paying special attention to potential entry points.
- Rub markings. Greasy markings on walls inside your facility may indicate a rat is regularly traveling down the same path. You will notice that rodents frequent the same route inside your facility as a direct line between food and nesting areas.

This winter, close your doors to rodent intruders. By putting proactive safeguards in place, your facility can enjoy the winter seasons without the appearance of unwanted visitors.

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