



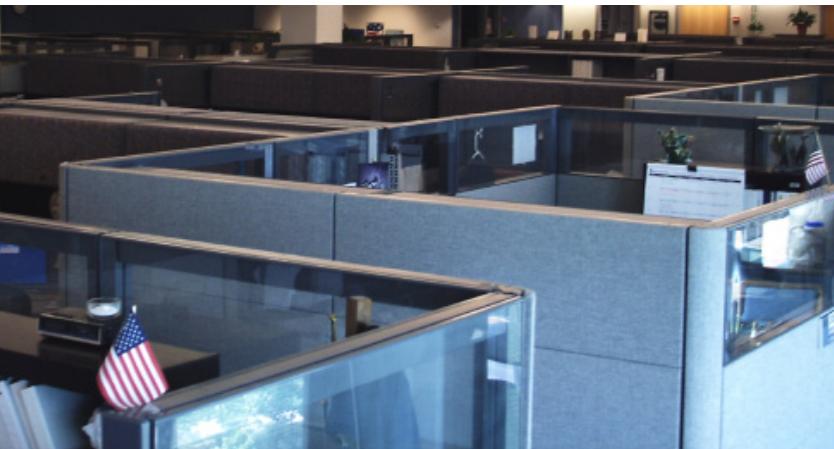
# Rodent control in high-security facilities

By Paul J. Bello

**S**everal months ago, I received a call regarding an ongoing rodent problem at a military facility. There had been a history of rodent intrusion, including mice and Norway rats. The current problem was with mice.

The call came at about 4:30 p.m. on a Friday. On Monday morning I attended a *pre*-meeting with the prime contract manager, the assistant contract manager, four representatives of the pest management service provider, and another pest management contractor who serviced another portion of the contract. During the pre-meeting, the account history and current situation were discussed so everyone was familiar with the situation prior to the meeting with the customer.

**Work stations such as these provide a maze of hidden voids, travel routes and potential harborage for mice. Employees unknowingly might provide food resources to mice without being educated (by pest management professionals) on actions they can take to help prevent mice and other pests.**



As described by the prime contract manager, the existing mouse problem had persisted for nearly two years — with the capture and sighting log numbers fluctuating all along. Sightings were occurring in nearly every department within these large buildings, and ultimate control was apparently nowhere in sight.

Three mice had been spotted during a recent high-level meeting in the facilities' commanding officer's conference room. That's when the facilities director was called and ordered to "do whatever it takes to solve the problem once and for all" — included calling me.

Those of you familiar with similar situations probably can guess the overall tone of the pre-meeting. There were various levels of finger pointing about the reasons for control failure and even some objections to the presence of an independent outside consultant. However, these areas were skillfully smoothed over by the prime contract manager, and the entire group of us marched to the "real" meeting with the base contract officer, the facilities director and his staff. It was a military base, so we marched as well as a group of eight civilian contractors is able.

Totalling about 900,000 square feet, with nearly 4,500 employees and nine floors, these buildings are more than capable of supporting a significant number of rodents.

We were escorted to a security

checkpoint where we had our identification checked, driver's licenses copied, bags checked and cell phones relinquished. We even walked through body scanners prior to entering the building. When we got to the facilities department, we met in a conference room appropriately referred to as The War Room.

During *this* meeting, the facilities director and his staff presented their rodent sightings log data and expressed various concerns with a palpable sense of urgency and desperation. Perhaps the facilities director explained the situation best when he said, "When a three-star interrupts his meeting to chew my butt because he has three mice in his office, then this situation now has the attention at the highest authority."

Up to this point, I hadn't said much, as it was better to learn as much as possible during these meetings. However, the facilities director capped his three-star comment with, "What are you going to do for us?"

It was suddenly my turn to speak. It was obvious everyone was experiencing increasing levels of frustration. Diffusing the tension was of primary importance. My response was short, simple and based on sound pest management and problem-solving practices. I said we needed to thoroughly inspect the facilities, learn as much as possible about the operations and structures, review all related records, and discuss what was being seen and done — all in the name of rectifying the situation ASAP (military-speak for "as soon as possible").

### Going on tour

A tour of the facilities immediately followed our War Room meeting. The facilities were impressive in



When working in high-security areas, such as military locations, it's not unusual to be stopped for security identification checks by armed guards at any time. PMPs need to carry their photo IDs on person at all times.

size, history and function. As we toured the building, the facilities director shared some useful information.

We then came to a "black box area," which I was told was off-limits to us. My reply to this was: Mice don't need security clearance; no amount of security measures will keep mice from entering any part of the facilities. Mice and other pests essentially have total access.

One phone call to the commanding officer's office later, the security door opened like magic. However, of our nine-person entourage, only I was allowed to enter — with the facilities director.

These guys make airport security look like elementary school hall monitors. We entered behind a reinforced steel security door with a peephole and security code keypad. Behind this door was another, similar door placing us in an elevator-sized steel box. A telephone handset was used to communicate with security beyond the second door, and that door then opened.

Once inside, we were greeted by an armed guard, presented our photo identification yet again, had my driver's license copied and signed into a guest log book. We then were assigned to a security escort officer. All of the security officers wore sidearms.

While the armed guards were intimidating, the fact that every person working there covered his or her computer screen as we walked by was a little disconcerting as well. My guess is that they were either playing Angry Birds or working on the design and development of top secret military equipment.

Later that day, we arrived at the office of the commanding officer. We were met by a captain, who spoke with the facilities director privately about our visit. After a few minutes we were informed only I was allowed to enter certain rooms of this office area, leaving the remainder of our group in the hall.

Inspection of this area yielded evidence and information similar to that found elsewhere within the facilities. Evidence of mouse activity was widespread and consistent with what would be expected — gnawing marks on various surfaces and numerous droppings. What was blatantly obvious was the lack of a

*Continued on page 74*

Mice have zero regard or respect for security clearance procedures.



Continued from page 71  
suitable amount of rodent bait and other control placements.

### Mouse control, and other concerns

Given a sufficiently large rodent population, there will be individuals with varied perspectives. While some might wish to see all mice eliminated immediately, others might view them as furry little friends and all pest management efforts as inhumane.

Some might set mouse traps in their work areas at their own expense; others might spend their time sabotaging these traps, rendering them ineffective. Successfully dealing with the mice is hard enough without having human interference. In extreme cases, such interference might need to be handled effectively on an individual basis through the appropriate client personnel.

Usually we're not inspecting for human signs (literally)



It was clear this department had trapped at least 40 mice, each of which was named.

of mouse activity; however, an existing mouse infestation was blatantly obvious (see photo above). These signs were present in many locations within the facilities.

The presence of raised floor panels building-wide (see photo on page 76) provided mice with undetected access to all areas of the facilities. The hollow void under

*Continued on page 76*

## Lessons learned

It's an extra privilege and honor to work in certain locations. There likely have been many unique locations each of us have visited due to pest problems over the years. As pest management professionals (PMPs), we get to go behind the curtain and see things others never will. My career's behind-the-scenes tours have included backstage passes to sports stadiums and arenas, theme parks, cruise ships, airline planes, naval vessels, zoos, hospitals, operating rooms, prisons, research facilities, theaters, tankers and freight ships, trains, power plants, manufacturing locations and museums. While these locations might have some similarities, government and military locations in particular present several logistical challenges, including the following:

**1 Extra security:** Just about anything military is associated with increased levels of security. However, those locations where certain development and other secret work is being conducted can include sensitive, high-tech, high-security areas. These areas will always be a prime consideration of the client, and you must be willing and able to comply with the security protocol and parameters associated with the contract.

We're not talking about checking your driver's license at the door. We're talking about the military digging many years back into your personal background, along with other background checks/verifications needed to be approved for work at certain locations.

While we might expect certain aspects of security background checks to be common, some locations have unique parameters and requirements. It is wise to review the security requirements prior to sending employees out to visit any secure location. The location I describe in the accompanying article had security requirements that were stricter than many others; it required each technician approved to work there be U.S.-born. This was of particular concern because the pest management company had sent at least two technicians who were not born in the United States. When the security officer discovered this, he escorted the PMPs off site.

**2 Getting paid:** In some government contracts, the pest management work might be included as part of a main contract that covers many areas of work. The prime contractor bids on and is awarded the contract. Under these circumstances, any entity performing work under the main contract that is not the prime contractor is a subcontractor. The prime contractor invoices the agency that issued and awarded the bid, gets paid by this agency, and then pays the subcontractors. The subcontractors invoice for their work as indicated within the parameters of the bid and/or arrangements agreed to with the prime contractor.

Those experienced with government and military contract work might have learned it can take more than 30 days for invoices to be paid. You must be able to account for this when managing your company's cash flow. It's wise to read all of the bid work in advance, and have a full understanding of the invoicing and remittance procedures for such contract work. Subcontractors might have little control over the payment policies of the prime contractor, and little recourse for getting paid other than to withhold work or take other actions to ensure payment is received for services rendered.

**3 Safety and town hall meetings:** After completing an on-site inspection, analyzing the existing situation, deciding upon viable options and preparing a written report with recommendations, it would seem it's time to implement the plan and get started on the rodent management work — but this typically is not the case on most military installations.

Before rodent management field work can begin, a few folks typically need to discuss the action plan prior to its eventual implementation. There are safety committees that must be consulted, as well as the entire staff population.

In this case, the action plan was reviewed with the facilities department and approved; however, the base health, base safety and specific entity safety department committee officers also were required to review and approve the plan. Once this extensive process was completed, a series of town hall-type meetings were conducted so concerned staff members had the opportunity to have their questions answered. Finally, the go-ahead was given and the plan of action commenced. — PJB



*Continued from page 74*  
the floor was approximately 4.5-inches deep, providing an ideal travel path for rodent and other pest activity. However, because each floor was a concrete slab, the void area essentially was a desert where no food or water resources was present to support mice. This actually served as a significant advantage for our mouse management efforts.

As in many commercial accounts, food resources for mice typically is provided unknowingly by the humans. Food service areas, vending machines, snack or coffee break areas and the food employees store at their workstations can be sufficient to support a growing mouse population. With food being a limiting factor, the strategic placement of baited traps in combination with the judicious application of rodenticide bait provided an effective one-two punch that knocked out the long-standing mouse problem in short order.



**Computer and fiber optic communications cables present building-wide were at continued risk of damage because of the existing mouse infestation.**

### **Education, communication & documentation**

An integral portion of an effective rodent management program includes education, communication and documentation. Account staff and those affected by an infestation need to understand the reasons rodents are pests and be provided practical tips they can use to help reduce conducive conditions, helping enhance results of the management program. With the advent of desktop publishing, today's pest management professionals (PMPs) have the ability to distribute well-prepared pest information sheets.

Suitably written communications can be used to address various aspects of any pest management program, especially when many people are involved. These communications can be delivered via email, websites and other electronic means. Remember, communications need to flow two ways. While PMPs are present at an account on a limited basis, members of the client's staff are there each day and

*Continued on page 78*



## Simple math

Sometimes it's difficult to catch 10 mice with 10 traps; it can be that much more difficult to catch 10 mice with three traps. A common observation when visiting problematic accounts is an insufficient quantity of control materials and devices are used. If we expect to eliminate a large rodent population, we often need to use more control materials.

Because some had concerns associated with the use of snap traps and rodenticides at the account described in this article, the previous control program was limited to the use of glue boards. The limited effectiveness of this sole-technology effort, however, allowed the rodent population to grow over time. — PJB

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Thanks to misguided concerns about the use of "toxicants," glue boards were used exclusively at this super-secure military complex for many months. Sole reliance on this one method resulted in an increase of the mouse population. To be clear: Glue boards have their place in integrated rodent management practices. It's just typically not wise to rely on a single control technology or technique.



Use of a variety of traps baited with a variety of attractants quickly harvested large numbers of mice.

*Continued from page 76*

can provide information about activity. Logs should be available to record all rodent sightings and related information.

Documentation of pest sightings, harvested rodent pests and other pertinent data should be properly recorded for program analysis and reporting to the client. Suitable documentation is necessary so program results can be evaluated and adjusted on a continued basis.

The bottom line: When it comes to performing rodent management work at super-secure facilities, no area is secure from infestation — or inspection. **PMP**

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