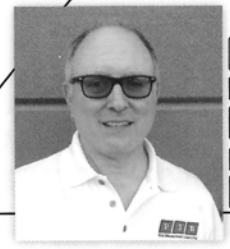


# Case Study: Solving a Long Term Serious Ant Problem

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A call arrived from a local hospital where Argentine ants had been a long term problem. As usual with this species, the ants were seen trailing in kitchen, pantry and break room areas where they foraged for food and numerous ants were frequently observed as they trailed to various locations.

Ants are generally viewed as tolerable insect intruders in comparison to cockroaches, which are usually seen as being disgusting. It was when these ants made their way to the cardiac intensive care unit that the problem became serious enough to garner the attention of management.

The section of the hospital where this problem was happening involved five stacked floors. According to staff representatives Ants had been a continued problem here for at least two years. The problem was regarded as serious when ants were found foraging on patient beds, intravenous lines and patients themselves in the ICU. In fact, the problem was so significant that two entire ICU floors were vacated and patients relocated. This is what prompted the call.

Of course, the first step in resolving a pest problem is the correct identification of the target pest. These ants had been previously identified as Odorous House ants but the ants observed here were Argentine ants. These ant species are similar in appearance and behavior. While a misidentification would be incorrect, their behavior would be close enough such that the control methodologies would be similar for both.

The hospital staff had explained that *"they've done everything"* to get rid of these ants and that *"nothing was working"*. Review of the treatment records indicated that hundreds of gallons of insecticide had been applied both indoors

and out. The staff stated that they had weekly "power sprays" done around the outside of the building for the past eight weeks yet the ant problem continued.

Experienced pest professionals already know that individual ants are relatively easy to kill. As such, consideration of the available information would lead one to a thought process which would consider; if all this work was being done correctly, what's going wrong and why are we still seeing so many ants?

Under such circumstances, it is wise to question and consider what factors are being missed, what are the various possibilities and how might the known biology and behavior of these pests affect the situation. Such themes are useful when working to resolve problematic pest situations.

During the inspection of the facility things just didn't add up. Something was going wrong and my suspicions could be confirmed with relatively little effort and time if only the ants would cooperate.

As you may know, Argentine ants are a type of tramp ant. These ants utilize pheromones, or chemical signals, to establish forage trails to and from food resources and back to their nest locations. We know this trailing is part of their normal behavior and we can use this behavior against them.

The staff informed me of several areas where ants were being seen on a daily basis. Jelly packets "borrowed" from the hospital cafeteria were opened and placed in a few areas for the ants to find and we went on a lunch break. Given sufficient time the ants would establish forage trails to and from the jelly placements such that nest locations could be found.

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