

# Communication is king

*Effective communication is an essential element of pest control. It must operate across the range of suppliers, clients, the general public and other stakeholders with an interest in the industry e.g. legislators. It is of paramount significance. Here some of the most recent initiatives are reviewed by Dr Graham Dodd of GDC Services.*

In today's environment, if you mention communication or information transfer you automatically think electronic. Email is now so well established as a communications vehicle that



Many within the industry forecast electronic communication as the way forward for the future.

many of us feel our right arm has been cut off if it fails to work – a feeling similar to leaving home without your mobile phone.

Some pest control operations have taken full advantage of the electronic gadgets and systems which are available and have linked them together to form a communications super

highway. Cannon Pest Control is one example – see article on pages 20 and 21 of this edition. Another example would be Eagle Pest Control who has adopted the mobileworker system from Codegate. This system manages the pest control service scheduling and includes satellite navigation and vehicle tracking – two further communications tools.

More down to earth means of communication include television, radio, journals, exhibitions, posters, reports, direct mails etc. But let us not forget one vital factor. We are all individuals – to succeed in pest control the communications bridge must be routinely spanned – often by means of a simple one-to-one conversation.

## The goals for communication

Going back to first principals, the BPCA's aims and objectives centre on the need to communicate. It is important:

- When representing the interests of its members and the industry as a whole;
- In the creation of a favourable environment in which to operate;
- Encouraging high standards of professionalism;
- Explaining the role of the pest control industry to the community.

In practice, the Level 2 Certificate in Pest Control developed jointly by the BPCA and The Royal Society for the Promotion of Health (RSPH) identifies the need to communicate effectively with clients using a range of skills, namely:

- The need for clear, written, communication;
- The importance of effective communication with ethnic minorities, speakers of other languages and an awareness of cultural sensibilities;
- Reporting of client comments, complaints and suggestions to managers;
- Advice to clients regarding:
  - Pest control measures taken, the location of baits and the possible need for future visits.
  - Required remedial action relating to infestations.
  - Housekeeping and maintenance required to prevent re-infestation.
  - Suggestion of alternative remedies if required.
- Importance of a professional approach to clients.

## Communication in practice

Pest management involves developing a knowledge of infestations through inspections, the application of measures directed at denying pests access to food, water and harbourages aided, where necessary, by the application of a suitable biocide.

Dr Zia Siddiqi, Quality Assurance Director for Atlanta-based Orkin Inc. in the USA (an Observer member of the BPCA) has

Communication with the general public is often important to achieve successful pest control – as illustrated by this selection of items.

- 1 Communication in the appropriate language is key – as illustrated by this range of BPCA leaflets, now available in five languages.
- 2 Raising awareness of a problem helps with control as Keep Britain Tidy has experienced.
- 3 The general public needs to be aware of the importance of protecting public health.
- 4 New Forest District Council alert visitors to the dangers of Lyme disease.
- 5 The 'Protected Premises' door hanger from Bayer provides essential information about treatments including pest controller details.
- 6 The Amsterdam Project aims to raise awareness of the benefits provided by pest control.
- 7 Problem-specific pest leaflets from the Merseyside Pest Liaison Group help educate the general public.



observed that Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programmes are successful because they are 'a process, not a one-time event.' The employees of clients, Dr Siddiqi says: "Must be the daily eyes and ears of the IPM programme, be cognisant of sanitation issues that affect the programme and report any signs of pest activity. A successful programme relies on the knowledge, co-operation and commitment from everyone involved." Communication is key.

In practical terms these requirements are reflected in the need to be alert to and report infestations. Also management of the environment through measures such as clearing spillages of potential foodstuffs and water, keeping doors and windows closed etc. These messages can be conveyed through posters, which inform plant operatives of the problems that pests cause and what should be done to deal with them.

Rentokil's *Pestaware* service employs A2 posters and A5 stickers, for use in strategic areas to convey essential messages directed at creating a pest-free working environment. They advise: 'Stack with a gap... don't store on the floor' or 'Spillages attract pests... clean up as you go.' In the words of John Charlton, Technical Director at Rentokil Initial: "It is the duty of the pest control contractor to give preventive and control advice based upon facts. Simply doing as they ask, or promising results within unattainable timescales, is not necessarily in the best interest of the customer who pays us for our knowledge, experience and expertise."

The need for effective communication has been amply demonstrated in various pest control campaigns led by Manchester City Council (MCC). There is a particular threat of pest problems in city centres where businesses share high density, structurally complex buildings. The pests may occupy substantial areas of the buildings but pest management measures are often un-coordinated. As Dave Oldbury, Group Manager for Environmental Health Services for MCC has observed: "The key to a successful control campaign is a commitment from all parties."

Managers of affected premises must appreciate the need for adequate communication and understanding with their pest control contractor. Their responsibility does not end when

they employ the contractor. When establishing pest management campaigns Dave Oldbury's department seeks to raise the profile of pest control through public meetings, inspections, monitoring and, if appropriate, enforcement procedures. It is important to get managers to 'buy into' the need for pest control and to provide them with advice on how they and their staff can contribute to the control of pests. This might extend beyond the infested premises where, for example, employees may inadvertently spread infestations to their living accommodation or *vice versa*.

Hospitals provide an ideal environment for pests. Dr Gai Murphy of the University of Salford and Dave Oldbury reported the results of a survey of Environmental Health departments following the removal of Crown Immunity protection for hospitals to the International Conference on Insect Pests in the Urban Environment held in 1996. They concluded that: "The involvement of hospital staff, coupled with effective liaison between authorised officers, contractors and, where appropriate, environmental health departments should ensure that the vast majority of hospitals achieve pest free environments and eliminate a potential public health risk."

Concerns about incidents in which wildlife species have died as a result of the use of pesticides and the appearance of low-level residues in some predatory birds and mammals has resulted in an industry-led campaign directed at the responsible use of rodenticides in rural areas. Dr Alan Buckle of the University of Reading chairs the Campaign for Responsible Rodenticide Use (CRRU), which employs the 'Think Wildlife' logo to promote a seven-point code of practice. The campaign messages are being disseminated through a variety of media including leaflets, brochures, journal and newspaper articles, exhibitions, training programmes for the users of rodenticides and the CRRU website.

### Communication with the public and other influencers

With some pest control projects, success can only be assured with the help of the general public. In his quest to manage the pigeons in Trafalgar Square in London, the mayor –



Ken Livingstone – endeavoured to communicate with all interested parties. The pigeons were cleared from the square, but only after much time and effort was expended on consultation and communication.

However, a successful campaign to control pigeons in the centre of Stoke-on-Trent was described at the 2000 Pest-Ventures seminar by Malcolm Hawksworth of Stoke-on-Trent City Council. A variety of measures were employed aimed at encouraging the public and businesses to deny the birds a source of food and deter them through scaring and proofing. The local media publicised the 'airborne rat campaign' involving an evil-looking cartoon: 'Percy the Pigeon' which helped to destroy the pigeon's street credibility.

On a national level, Keep Britain Tidy ran a high profile food litter campaign in 2002 focussing on the link between discarded food and the rat population. Such was the success of the initial venture, a new campaign was launched in August 2006. Amongst other promotions, perhaps the highest profile activity was an advertisement run in cinemas throughout England. BPCA and CIEH played their part, as they sponsored a freely available A4 window sticker for general use as a means of communicating an important message contributing to the control of rats.

New Forest District Council embarked on a campaign to alert those visiting its area of the dangers of Lyme disease following a case of the disease in 1986. An early fact sheet was followed in 1989 by a leaflet, which was revised in 2003. The leaflet, *Just a Tick... Tick Bites and Lyme Disease*, details the disease with particular attention paid to the vector. Clear illustrations help to increase the awareness of readers to ticks, how their bites can be avoided, dealt with if they occur and how the disease presents. It was important not to overemphasise the threat posed by the disease whilst catering for a wide range of interest groups. The leaflet is distributed widely as part of a campaign which includes an award winning poster, exhibition, website and journal articles etc. Other organisations can license the leaflet and it is currently being employed in Somerset and Scotland.

The Amsterdam Project was established in 2005. It is sponsored by a group of international manufacturers and distributors of pest control products in conjunction with the Confederation of European Pest Control Associations (CEPA) and the National Pest Management Association (NPMA) based in the USA. One aim is to increase the awareness amongst consumers, legislators and public officials of the advantages and benefits that the pest management industry brings to public and environmental health. These include the supply of food free of contamination and the preservation of buildings from damage by pests. The World Health Organisation Report into Urban Pest Control, currently awaiting publication, promises to provide further authoritative information concerning the benefits to public health deriving from pest management in Europe and North America. Good communication of the message is vital. The plan is to disseminate it by way of published reports, conferences, seminars and individual meetings.

To conclude, the industry is alert to the need to communicate. The topic features in its leading training programmes and the power of employing communication to achieve effective and efficient pest control is widely recognised.

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