

BASF Pest Control Solutions: new name, new directions

After a rather turbulent year following the purchase of Sorex by BASF, the new company now seems set to face the future. *Pest* editor, Frances McKim, went to visit BASF at their HQ in Widnes to find out what's in store.

Arriving at the offices on the St Michael's trading estate in Widnes you could be forgiven for thinking you have arrived at the wrong location. All remnants of the previous Sorex identity have gone, yet the BASF presence has still to appear. This is only a temporary position, as planning permission is awaited before BASF can erect the corporate flag poles and signs it wishes to use to brand its latest addition to its multi-national empire. Although only flagpoles, they are symbolic of the plans BASF has for the former Sorex operation – extensive resources and commitment behind the scenes, yet the organisation is still something of a butterfly trying to leave its chrysalis, as it has yet to fully emerge.

Once in the building and with the BASF managers the impression changes. Head of sales, Siôn Price, is now responsible for a growing sales team selling BASF products in over 70 different countries from Ireland to all

points as far east as Russia, and from Europe in the north all the way to South Africa, including, for good measure, the Middle East. This geographic split forms the European remit of BASF Pest Control Solutions which is to be headquartered at Widnes. There is another regional office already up and running in North America with offices in South America and Asia to follow. Whilst the business is being run as a separate unit within BASF, it is still part of the corporate 'Matrix' so benefiting from the considerable financial resources of the parent, coupled with this multi-national's local in-country presence. As Siôn so aptly puts it: "There's always someone to call on with local language skills, whatever the country."

Communicating with customers in their native language is an important feature. "Local service for local people," explains Siôn. "If a Polish customer rings, we want a

Familiar names like Neokil and Neosorex will be joined by products like Goliath Gel and Fendona and, with the financial might and commitment of BASF, there is the strong likelihood of new products and techniques being brought onto the market.

Polish person to be able to respond."

Head of marketing is Martina Flynn. "We have divided our business into three strategic segments driven by the breakdown of our customers," explains Martina. "These three 'pillars' of our business are public health, professional pest control and rural hygiene. All are similar in terms of target pests and delivery technology."

With the Sorex pedigree behind them, it is no surprise that the professional pest control business includes insecticides and rodenticides destined for use in commercial and residential buildings. However, with this comes the addition of BASF's termite business centred on the company's Termidor brand. Although not a problem in the UK, termites are gaining in importance in Europe and, globally, rank as the number one structural pest.

The rural hygiene pillar is very much in line with the old Sorex business consisting of insect, rodent and disinfectant products for use by farmers around their farms. Public health, however, is another new addition brought on board by BASF. This sector is primarily funded by non-governmental organisations (NGO) and centres on mosquito control with impregnated bed nets and liquid applications to structures, air and water. It is in this area that the benefits of such a multi-skilled organisation come to fruition. "The BASF polymers division has the expertise to develop the fibres for the nets, which, combined with insecticides from pest control, makes a world-beating combination," enthuses Martina.

Other new sectors brought in by the BASF



Additions to the BASF Pest Control Solutions sales team. Mark Downing (left), head of operations at the Widnes site shows Hassan Elamri and Mohammed Chetouani, members of the North Africa commercial team around the rodenticide manufacturing facilities

stable are products for the forestry, amenity, ornamental and turf markets – certainly pest control in its widest sense.

Diverse maybe, but all nurtured within this separate Pest Control Solutions business sector. "A distinct business unit, with its own business goals and separate dedicated research and development budget," adds Siôn. "With the financial might and commitment of BASF behind us, this means we can now combine the research clout of BASF with the customer intimacy we built up with Sorex, so we can now develop those ideas identified by our customers. Before, resources were always a limiting factor. BASF will be one of a small handful of multi-nationals undertaking dedicated pest control research."

So what does all this mean for the practical pest controller in the UK? In short it's good news.

Pest controllers world-wide now have a dedicated and committed company prepared to concentrate its resources on pest control. The familiar previously Sorex branded products used day-in day-out, such as Neokil and Neosorex will remain and they will be joined by BASF products such as Goliath Gel and Fendona. In addition, there is the strong likelihood of new innovative products and techniques being brought rapidly onto the market. At the same time, the people who provide the face of the organisation remain. Product manufacturing will stay at Widnes, with the brands starting to roll-out in their new BASF livery any day now.

All is not totally rosy though. On the down-side the individual characteristics we had all grown to like of the very British Sorex company are likely to be subsumed into this far larger multi-national organisation. The Network bird control business was deemed not to be core – as it did not have a chemical focus – so this was put up for sale. After nearly a year's negotiations, it was announced, just before Christmas, that the new owner is to be P+L Systems (see page 5).

As to the future, the team at Widnes certainly have their fingers on the pest control pulse. Increasing urban sprawl and climate change are identified as key trends, as are the ever increasing rise of food safety and hygiene standards. New pests, such as bedbugs, are recognised along with the need for new innovative and cost effective solutions. As to how it all ends up, only time will tell – but the omens are good.



Head of sales is Siôn Price with Martina Flynn as head of marketing

BASF Pest Control Solutions Timeline

- 2009 – BASF Pest Control Solutions officially launched;
- 2008 – Sorex acquired by BASF;
- 2006 – Network integrated into Sorex;
- 2004 – Sorex acquires Whitmire Micro-Gen;
- 2003 – Launch of Sorex International;
- 1999 – Licensing agreement with Zeneca for selected PCO products in Europe;
- 1998 – Acquisition of Network Pest Control Services;
- 1996 – Sorex purchased from Shell by private investors;
- 1983 – Sorex develops flocoumafen;
- 1980 – Shell acquires Sorex as part of the Ward Blenkinsop purchase;
- 1972 – Difenacoum and brodifacoum invented;
- 1951 – Warfarin commercialised;
- 1949 – Establishment of Sorex (London) Ltd – the first to use anticoagulants against rodents.

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