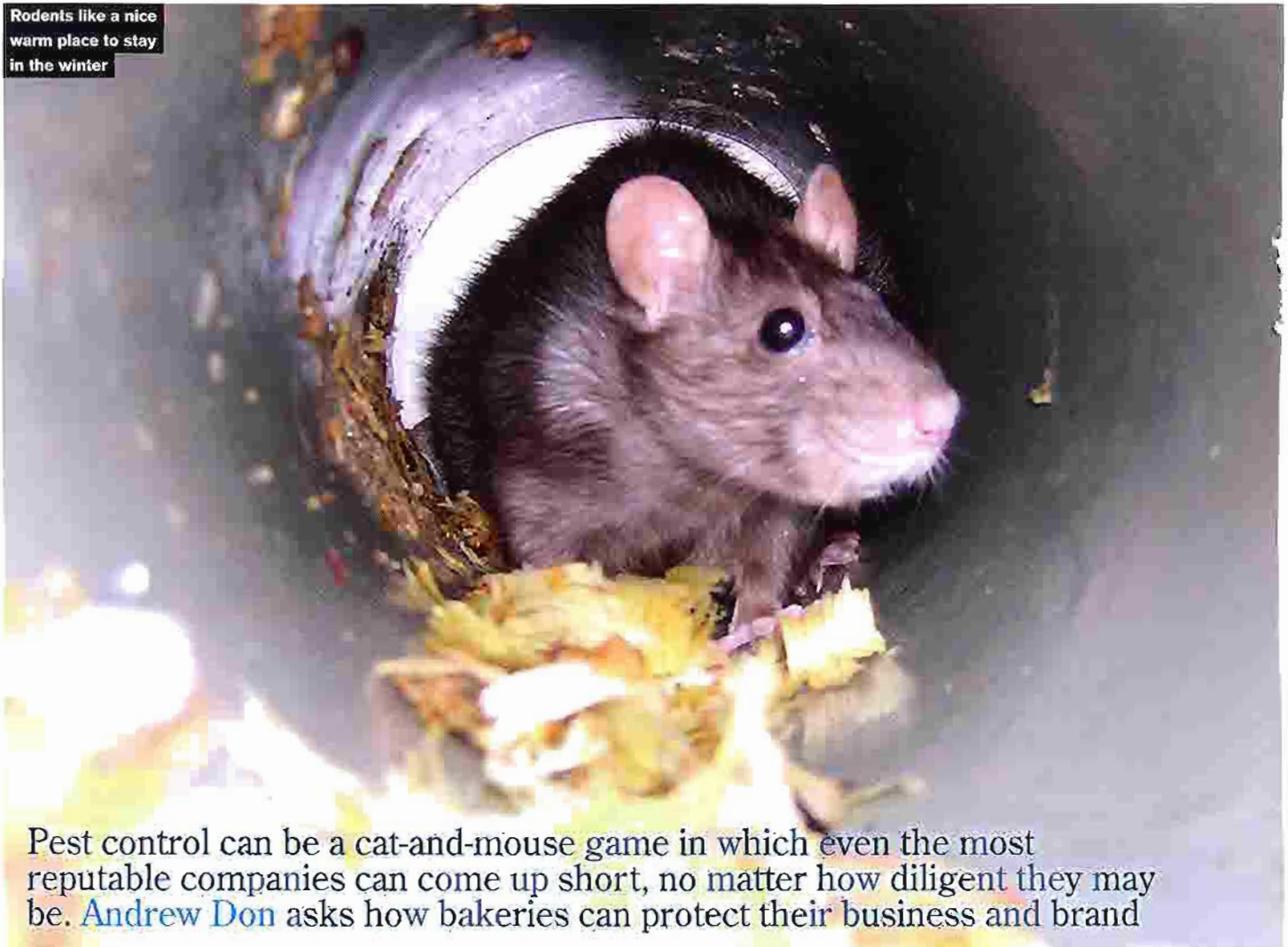


Rodents like a nice warm place to stay in the winter



Pest control can be a cat-and-mouse game in which even the most reputable companies can come up short, no matter how diligent they may be. **Andrew Don** asks how bakeries can protect their business and brand

Put paid to the pests

Now is the time when rodents will try to make their way indoors to find warm homes during the cold snap. And where better than a nice cosy bakery – your bakery?

Give them the smallest of opportunities and, before you know it, you have a monster of a problem. Rats will travel more than a mile every night to find food. Once they gain entry, it is a battle of both wits and time. A pregnant female can have up to 11 younglings in a litter and up to six litters a year, depending on the availability of food. And in bakeries there is no shortage of availability. Moreover, the young rats can breed after a period of just 10-12 weeks – a nightmare for any baker.

You do not have to go far back in the archives to find instances of bakeries and

A pest for all products

Coffee, cocoa: flour beetles, merchant grain beetles, warehouse moths

Cheese: mites, larder beetle, copra beetle

Dried fruit: Indian meal moth, merchant grain beetles, tobacco beetle, dried fruit beetle, mites

Flour and milled cereal products: flour beetles, mill moth, Indian meal moth, Cadelle, flat grain beetle, mites

Grain (wheat, rice, corn and other cereals): rice weevil, grain weevil, lesser grain borer, saw-toothed grain beetle, Cadelle, flour beetle, Indian meal moth and mites

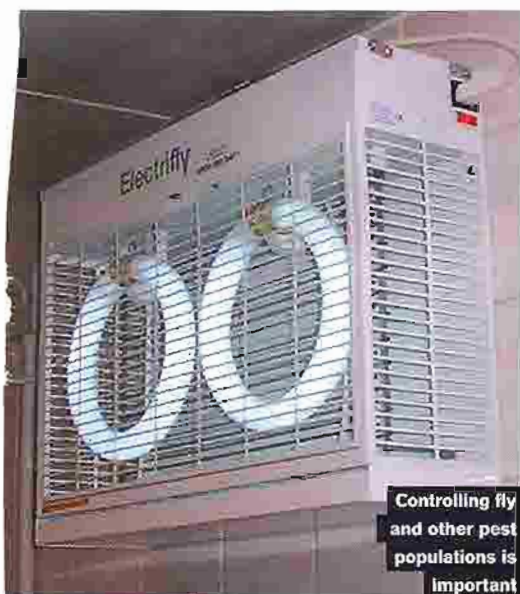
Nuts and confectionery: Indian meal moth, merchant grain beetle, mites

Source: Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

shops at the mercy of headlines proclaiming the likes of “Mouse found baked into loaf of bread”. Such was the story in September last year, with Oxford Crown Court fining Premier Foods £16,821 after a rodent was discovered squashed into the crust of a Hovis Best of Both loaf – a nasty shock for Stephen Forse, from Kidlington, who bought it from his local Tesco.

Delving further back in the archives to six years ago, a Somerfield own-label loaf, baked by British Bakeries, was contaminated with dead new-born mice, droppings and hair. Devizes Magistrates Court, in Wiltshire, fined British Bakeries £7,000 plus £2,015 costs.

Andy Barker, quality assurance manager at Birds of Derby, with 50 shops and one production bakery, told *British Baker*: “Nobody



Controlling fly and other pest populations is important



Last year, a rodent was discovered squashed into the crust of a Hovis loaf of a Hovis loaf

lives in a perfect world. Now and again, people get caught out. You try to do everything you can to stop something happening, but nobody is perfect. You can be the best company in the world, but things still happen. Even if you had a guy on-site 24/7 there's still a chance."

Paul Bates, managing director of Surrey-based pest-control company Cleankill, reckons bakery stores that have flats above them and adjacent residential properties are at increased risk in areas where councils – 225 of them at the last count – have reduced refuse collections to fortnightly.

Businesses normally pay for their own private bin collections, but Bates says the problem can occur when there are flats upstairs and homes that surround the business. "If you have a row of shops, they will have houses and flats around them and people leave rubbish bags in the back alleys, rather than in enclosed bins. In London, in particular, the foxes rip the bags apart and carry bones and fruit out of the bags and leave them in hidden areas where they start rotting. The rats find them and start infesting the shops."

The law

● **Food Hygiene Regulations – Regulation (EC) 178/2002 of the European Parliament:** this regulation lays down the principles and requirements of food law. Article 14 of Regulation (EC) 178/2002 deals with unsafe food. It is an offence not to comply with article 14 under the General Food Regulations 2004. Food shall be deemed unsafe if it is considered to be injurious to health or unfit for human consumption.

● **Regulation (EC) 852/2004:** these regulations lay down general hygiene requirements for all food business operators and state that:

1. the layout, design and construction of food premises are to permit good food hygiene practices, including protection against contamination and, in particular, pest control.
2. adequate procedures should be in place to control pests.

Source: Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

Bates says a big problem for retail bakers is the shopfront area, which attracts wasps when there are the like of sticky doughnuts in the window.

Flour bins are ripe for infestation and dough and flour residues can build up in the baking area. "So many pests can attack areas like that. If wet rotting dough residues are lying around, bigger fly species attack, says Bates.

Pigeons, too, are a menace for retail bakeries, attracted to old bread put out for collection. And birds will often roost in front of the shop, creating a hygiene problem with fouling on the shop and a slippery surface at the entrance.

Cleankill, which has retail bakers among its clients, believes all responsible owners have pest-control contracts with companies such as his. "It is rare, now, for us to be called into a bakery because they have a problem and do not have a contract in place."

Quarterly industry charges average about £140 for pest control contracts, according to Bates, so he maintains that the outlay is worthwhile when you consider the repercussions of infestation.

Other pests

Rodents and flies, wasps and pigeons are not the only pests to watch out for. Flour moths, also known as meal moths, can be found in flour, whole grains, cereal, dried fruits, nuts and seeds. Cockroaches, which are able to convert anything animal or vegetable into food and carry food poisoning germs on their bodies, are also a risk. Bates says to always check deliveries.

Simon Staddon, managing director of



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– Paul Bates, MD, Cleankill

Nicholas & Harris, a large craft bakery in Salisbury, Wiltshire, which holds the UK licences for the Village Bakery brand of wheat-free rye breads, Vogel's seed and grain breads and Cranks organic breads, says the key is prevention and monitoring. His company contracts Rokill to monitor for pest activity and it has traps placed strategically. Rokill comes on-site weekly to ensure the 45,000sq ft bakery stays pest-free.

"We've never had anything that we haven't been able to deal with swiftly. Like any other bakery, we might get the odd mouse caught in one of our perimeter traps and technical manager Callum Devine deals with this."

Cleankill advises the following to eliminate problems:

- Proof the bottom of doors, so rodents cannot get underneath
- Make sure the perimeter of your premises is sound and secure
- Repair broken air vents and ensure all service pipes have seals
- Check under shelving on the shop floor and in the store cupboard to make sure there are no broken packets of food
- Raise stock off the ground on shelving
- Have a cleaning plan in place and make sure staff sweep and mop daily and pull out the fridge to expose areas where rodents can hide
- Dispose of any stock if you have a suspicion that it has been contaminated
- Keep an eye out for droppings and take immediate action
- Be wary if there is an empty premises next door, because any infestations could easily spread into your bakery.