The Urban Pest Management Conference in February was a fantastic way to prepare for the coming busy seasons. I sincerely thank everyone that made it such a great success. To those of you that attended, thank you. The planning committee, the speakers, and the exhibitors could put all the effort and work into the conference that they do, but it wouldn’t happen without those of you who support the event, which enjoyed record attendance this year. I look forward to reviewing some of your feedback and appreciate the surveys that were submitted. What I heard from most people during the conference was very positive.

We want to welcome Greg Poppe aboard as our District 5 director, and look forward to working more with Carl Braun, as he was re-elected as the District 2 Director. An old reminder tells you to count your blessings. Mine is a long list, but I’ll share a couple that I start my workday with; sunshine, and mice. Mice may not be as important to some as they are to others, but I would bet that sunshine is a common one this time of year. So, let’s welcome back sunshine, and watch out Spring, because here we come!

Amazon To Pay $1.2 Million In Illegal Pesticide Settlement

The Environmental Protection Agency announced a $1.2 million settlement with Amazon over the sale and distribution of illegal pesticides, one of the largest penalties assessed under federal pesticides laws.

Federal regulators said the agreement settles allegations that the Seattle-based internet giant committed nearly 4,000 violations between 2013 and 2016 for selling and distributing imported pesticide products not licensed for sale in the United States.

The pesticides, including insecticide in the form of chalk and cockroach bait powder, were sold by independent sellers who offered the products through Amazon’s website.

The products were sold through a program in which sellers provided products to Amazon, which stored them at its warehouses and shipped them after they were purchased, Chad Schulze, an EPA pesticide enforcement team lead, said at a news conference in Seattle Thursday.

It’s one of the first enforcement actions related to sales of illegal pesticide in the online marketplace, he added.

In a statement, Amazon said complying with regulations was a “top priority” and that it works quickly to take action when third-party sellers don’t follow the rules.

As part of the agreement filed in administrative court, Amazon agreed to develop an online training course to educate sellers about pesticides. The training will be available to the public and online sellers and available in English, Spanish and Chinese.

“This settlement is a step in the right direction to protect the public health and the environment,” said Ed Kowalski, who directs compliance and enforcement for the EPA region covering the Pacific Northwest.

EPA interns uncovered the illegal sales in 2014 while reviewing online marketplaces, identifying unregistered insecticide chalk being sold on Amazon.com.

EPA officials purchased and analyzed those products. It then issued two orders stopping sales, once in mid-2015 for the insecticide chalk and a second time in early 2016 after finding six other unregistered pesticides.

EPA officials said Amazon quickly removed the products and prohibited foreign sellers from selling the pesticides. In October 2016, the company notified people who bought the illegal pesticides and urged them to dispose of them. It also made refunds totaling about $130,000.

Most were purchases by individuals.

The EPA has limited tools to enforce laws against foreign sellers so regulators focus on services in the U.S. that are facilitating the sale of these products, Schulze said.

Illegal pesticides are still widely available for online purchase in the U.S., the EPA said.

“This is a very difficult avenue of pesticide sales to get our hands around and that’s what this action is starting to try to do,” Schulze said.
Dr. Shripat Kamble and Clyde Ogg
Receive Well-Deserved Awards

We were pleased to bestow the Distinguished Service Award for 2017 and 2018 this year to Dr. Shripat Kamble and Clyde Ogg respectively. Dr. Kamble was out of the country last year and was unable to be present to accept his award, so a double presentation was arranged for 2018. The photo above is (left to right) Clyde Ogg, Dr. Shripat Kamble, Dr. Bob Davis, and Tim Husen.

We honored Dr. Kamble for his years of work on the Urban Pest Management Conference. Clyde Ogg was also honored for his help on the Urban Pest Management Conference’s transition from Dr. Kamble’s retirement.

The photo above shows Clyde Ogg receiving his 2018 Distinguished Service Award from Nebraska State Pest Association President, Travis Lucas.

Congratulations to both men and thank you for your service to the pest management industry in Nebraska. We appreciate all your hard work on the conference!
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Don Lewis speaking on nature’s carpenters

Entomologists Janet Kintz-Early and Kristen van den Meiracker, both speakers at the conference

Giving out important information on ground beetles

NSPCA President Travis Lucas welcomed everyone

Dr. Robert Davis covered several topics: wood destroying organism inspections, fleas and spiders

Dr. Karen Vail delivers her talk on “Quick Inspections for Bed Bugs.”

“Cockroach Management” with Chad Gore from Rentokil North America

The sessions were well attended

Everyone enjoyed lunch together on Tuesday

Visiting the vendor exhibits
Plunkett’s Acquires Varment Guard

Fridley, Minn.-based Plunkett’s Pest Control has acquired Varment Guard Environmental Services, based in Columbus, Ohio. Terms were not disclosed. The merger represents the union of two family-owned companies and propels Plunkett’s into new markets, in addition to expanding its service specialties.

“We could not be happier to have the Varment Guard team join ours,” says Stacy O’Reilly, third-generation president of Plunkett’s Pest Control. “The biggest win for us is their people. Just a great group of individuals. It all starts there. We care deeply about keeping integrity and honest service values in our business.”

The merger expands Plunkett’s service area from 11 states to 17 states and brings the company’s annual revenue to about $55 million. Varment Guard is the largest acquisition in Plunkett’s history.

“In 1983, we started our company with the intent of creating a family business and the purpose of providing employment to those who might not have the opportunity to work anywhere else,” says Jim Vaive, co-owner and spokesperson for the Varment Guard ownership group, including Sandy Vaive, John Livingston and Scott Steckel. “We always strove to maintain a high level of integrity in our business and met all of our purposes. Eventually, we got to the point where it wasn’t possible to sell to heirs. That’s when we started investigating all kinds of potential buyers – somewhere around 20. We wanted a buyer who would keep the essence of our company intact and treat our customers and our employees well. Stacy and Plunkett’s team have been fantastic. Stacy moves with such intent and insight. And her team has shown incredible kindness and respect, and they share our values. It feels like home.”

Both Plunkett’s and Varment Guard are full-service residential and commercial pest management service providers. However, Varment Guard brings with it two new service offerings to Plunkett’s: wildlife and bird control.

“We’ve flirted with those services, but now we’re equipped to get serious,” says O’Reilly. “All in all, we anticipate great things coming from this merger.”

PPMA Unveils Tiny Termite House Project

The project has a YouTube video that provides an overview and preview of what’s to come.

The Professional Pest Management Alliance (PPMA), which serves as the public outreach arm of the National Pest Management Association (NPMA), has announces its latest research project. The Tiny Termite House was designed to show the destructive nature of termites in a controlled home environment. The group is set to dump 500,000 Formosan termites into a custom, built-to-scale, miniature dream home and capture them at work using a mix of high-definition video footage and photography. The PPMA released a video teasing the project which can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76ZiQm6I6AKU.

“This project is a really exciting one for our industry because we will be using sophisticated equipment to obtain never-before-seen footage of termites and glean more insight into the important roles that termite castes play in eating their way through homes,” says Cindy Mannes, executive director of PPMA. “The consumer education aspect of this project is huge. Our goal is to physically demonstrate the hidden dangers that these wood-destroying insects pose to consumers’ biggest investments, and hit home the importance of regular prevention and professional inspection.”

PPMA commissioned a third-party industry partner in the research and production aspects of the project. The tiny, two-story home is being constructed on a cement slab and equipped with insulation, plumbing and electricity to make it as authentic as possible. Other amenities include hardwood floors, a beautiful kitchen, a balcony overlooking an in-ground swimming pool and a manicured lawn. The home will be fitted with cameras to observe the progress of the termite colony from introduction to decimation.

Upon final completion of the project, PPMA will embark on robust consumer media relations and social media campaigns tied to Termite Awareness Week, March 11-17, 2018. The annual designation is recognized by Chase’s Calendar of Events and is celebrated throughout the pest management industry.

“Termite Awareness Week is a natural fit to unveil the findings and footage captured during the Tiny Termite House project,” adds Mannes. “As we approach prime termite season, now is the perfect time to communicate the importance of partnering with a licensed pest control professional to protect their home against these voracious pests.”
Rats May Not Be To Blame For Spreading The ‘Black Death’

Rats get a bad rap for spreading the plague, or Black Death, that killed millions of people in medieval Europe.

But it turns out that rats might not be to blame after all — instead, the disease may have spread from person to person through human-feeding parasites, including fleas and lice, a new study suggests.

The findings challenge “the assumption that plague in Europe was predominantly spread by rats,” the researchers wrote in their study, published online in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Plague is caused by a bacterium called Yersinia pestis, which is carried by rodents and their fleas. The disease is perhaps best known for killing an estimated one-third of the population in Europe in the 1300s, during a pandemic called the Black Death. However, researchers are unsure of exactly how the disease was transmitted during this pandemic.

In modern times, the disease is most commonly spread to humans when fleas that have fed on infected rats go on to bite humans. This also could have happened during the Black Death — for instance, when infected rats died, their flea parasites could have “jumped” from the recently dead rat hosts to humans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But some researchers argue that this mode of transmission doesn’t fit with the historical evidence. For instance, records from the time do not mention large numbers of rats dying off, as was seen in later outbreaks in Europe starting in the 19th century, according to the new study. And the Black Death spread much farther and faster, and killed many more people, than modern outbreaks do, the study authors said. This has led some researchers to speculate that human parasites played an important role in spreading the Black Death.

For example, fleas and lice could have fed on infected humans, and then transmitted the disease to other humans.

In the new study, the researchers used mathematical equations to create three different models of plague transmission during a series of outbreaks in Europe called the second pandemic, which includes the Black Death and occurred during the 14th through 19th centuries.

One model assumed the disease was spread from rats to fleas to people; a second model assumed the disease was spread from human fleas and body lice to other people; and a third model assumed the disease was spread from person to person through the air, which occurs only when people develop a form of plague known as pneumonic plague.

Using publicly available data on plague deaths in nine regions during the second pandemic, the researchers found that the human parasite model best reflected death rates in seven of the nine regions, compared with the other two models.

“Overall, our results suggest that plague transmission in European epidemics occurred predominantly through human [parasites], rather than commensal rat or pneumonic transmission,” the researchers wrote in their paper.

The researchers noted that their models could be improved with more data. For example, the models in the current study did not account for local conditions that could have affected disease transmission, such as war, famine, immunity and public health interventions, they said.

“Plague is undeniably a disease of significant scientific, historic and public interest, and is still present in many parts of the world today,” the researchers said. “It is therefore crucial that we understand the full spectrum of capabilities that this versatile, pandemic disease has exhibited in the past,” they concluded.

Do’s and Don’ts of Customer Relations

Loyal customers are key to growing your pest control business. To earn loyalty, build trust. To build trust, meet or exceed expectations in every interaction your company has. Successful companies plan their customers’ experience as carefully as they do their service protocols. QualityPro helps growing companies stay focused on consumer relations through its consumer relations standards and sample company policies. Here are a few of the lessons that QualityPro accredited companies have taught us over the years.

Do have customer communication policies — Take some time and list all the touch-points between your company and a consumer. Think through your customers’ experience at each interaction. What do they expect when they visit your website? Schedule service? Pay a bill? Design an experience that meets customers’ expectations and ensures consistent messaging across departments and methods of communication. Finally, put that experience in writing in your communication policies to make sure your customers’ experience remains consistent as people and technology change.

Don’t delegate everything — Your communication policies and service protocols should include scenarios in which an employee must bring in a manager or owner. There will be times when keeping a customer loyal will require personal communication from someone who has the authorization to make the situation right.

Do have a detailed service agreement — Your service agreement is the documentation of your expectations of your customer and your customer’s expectations of you. The service agreement gives you the opportunity to make sure both parties understand the commitment they are making to one another before starting service.

That said, you can’t rely on your customers to read every word of your service agreement. Think about the customer’s perceived contract — what they think they should be getting — and try to meet those expectations.

For more information, reference QualityPro Standard 3:2 Termite Warranty/Service Agreement* and the Model Termite Warranty available to companies that are pursuing and maintaining accreditation.

By Allison Allen, Executive Director, QualityPro
Little Black Ants by Dr. Jody Green

Here in Lancaster County, household ant identification and inquiries are high. Spring is on its way, but varying soil and air temperatures may not be stable enough to produce the food to support the many ants becoming active in the ecosystem. Ants serve an important role in the food web as natural predators to many insects and arthropods. The reasons they invade homes this time of year is due to hunger, thirst and easy entry.

It is important to know that though it appears there is an invasion of ants, these foragers comprise only a small proportion of the colony. The rest of the colony, which include queens, eggs, and larvae remain in the nest, most often located outdoors. Ants are social insects and have a distinct caste system. Each caste is responsible for a specific task; the foragers job is to find food to feed the colony.

Two species of ants that are commonly referred to as “little black ants**” to Nebraska homeowners are the pavement ant and the odorous house ant. Both ants are approximately 1/8-inch long, a brown-black color, attracted to sugar and associated with human activity. Neither species has an aggressive sting or bite, rather they are a nuisance when they enter homes and try to share/steal food from us. Both ants are considered “sugar ants.” They have dietary needs like humans, and at times feed on live and dead insects for protein.

Pavement Ant – Tetramorium caespitum

Appearance: Pavement ants have a petiole with two distinct nodes, and a pair of spines on the thorax. If you can look at an ant through a hand lens, you will see parallel ridges on the head and thorax.

Behavior: Pavement ants nest near concrete walkways, driveways, slabs or rocks. They work tirelessly to excavate galleries underground, moving individual particles with their mouthparts. Piles of loose sand or dry particles along cracks, vegetation, stones, expansion joints, window sills, baseboards or tiles indicate nesting sites. Pavements will forage on kitchen floors and counters. Homeowners report huge numbers of pavement ants battling over territory on the driveway or sidewalk for hours.

Odorous House Ant – Tapinoma sessile

Appearance: Odorous house ants can be identified by their side profile. The gaster or abdomen sits directly on the petiole, which makes the node appear hidden. When in doubt, perform the smash and sniff test.

Behavior: As described by the common name, odorous house ants are associated with houses and are known to emit a very strong odor when crushed. The smell has been de-scribed as rotten coconut, licorice-like and/or a lemon-scented cleaning solution. Colonies are found in close proximity to human activity and residences as nests can be found in landscape mulch, under boards, lumber, firewood, bricks, stones, debris and cardboard. When they locate a food source they will follow very distinct trails.

Integrated Pest Management for Ants

The first step in any pest issue is identification. Did you know there are close to 1000 ant species in North America? Only a handful of them are household pests, but each one of those has a distinct appearance, behavior, feeding preferences and habitat. In order to eliminate the ant, you have to get to know the ant.

The second step is to remove the conducive conditions that have allowed the ants to succeed thus far. Things like eliminating food, moisture and sealing up entryways into the structure. Where are they coming from? What are they eating? If you find they are trailing outdoors, seal the gap or hole with caulking or sealant appropriate for the location. Clean up the food source, which may be a piece of candy, cookie crumb, cupcake sprinkle or potato chip, then disinfect the area to remove traces of trail pheromone.

The third step is treatment which may include using an ant bait specifically for sugar feeding ants. The concept of ant bait is to have an attractive, palatable, slow-acting toxic food source that the ants will find and take back to the nest, share among nest mates and poison the entire colony. Both the pavement ant and the odorous house ant will readily feed on a liquid sugar ant bait. When nests can be located outdoors, treating with a labeled insecticide can be very successful.

**There is a species, Monomorium minimum, with the common name little black ant, but neither the pavement ant or the odorous house ant is this ant.

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