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Stop rodent damage and contamination fast. Neokil Gold Whole Wheat powered by FORTEC ensures rats eat more bait, faster. With Neokil Gold, the majority of rats will consume enough bait to reach a lethal dose in a single day. This delivers faster and more reliable control even in the presence of other foodstuffs.

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Behaviour led control

Boom or bust?

It's official. The UK economy is in recession. But, what's the mood in the pest control sector? **Pest** editor, Frances McKim canvassed industry opinions.

Forecasts are mixed – what is bad for one sector opens up opportunities for another. One thing is certain – everyone is delighted they are not in basic manufacturing or luxury goods.

A survey by the Local Government Association has revealed that one in seven councils in England plan to make redundancies and 22% of councils have introduced a recruitment freeze. The position in Scotland and Wales is no better. Balancing the budget is proving difficult. Council tax rises are frozen. Income is down, in particular the collapse of the housing market has seen fees from developers and planning applications disappear. Demand for essential services such as help for the homeless, debt counselling, housing advice, employment services and child protection following the Baby P case has increased. All council activities are under the spotlight.

Erewash Borough Council has already taken the plunge. It disbanded its pest control service in April 2008. Is this a taste of things to come? Paul Smith in the Environmental Health Team has responsibility for pest enforcement notices: "To my surprise, so far there has been no significant increase in the number of enforcement notices, but this may change. When we require any pest control work doing we have to go out to quote from local contractors."

It is hard to gauge the exact number of councils contemplating giving up, but another example is Peterborough City Council. In a good wasp year, the pest control team just about covers its costs, but the four-man unit is anxiously awaiting 25 February when the proposal to disband the service goes before council for final ratification. If approved, an outside contractor will be appointed.

Serious consequences

Commenting on these developments, Dave Oldbury, secretary of NPAP said: "The role of local authority pest control is to protect public health. In-house teams are the best option as they can be flexible and extend beyond the scope of any one individual, for example with block treatments of flats. Councils turning their backs on pest control may solve a short-term financial problem but at the expense of longer-term, more serious consequences."

Elsewhere in the market, the one prediction just about everyone agrees on is the likelihood of cash-strapped private householders (or those in areas where local authorities have thrown-in the towel) attempting DIY pest control. But with many pests, the chances of successful treatment are slim. Chris Parmiter from Barretine Environmental Health feels the industry should unite: "All parties need to pull together – to emphasise to the general public the benefits gained by paying for good, professional pest control."

The other factor everyone agreed on is that the market in 2009 will depend very heavily on the season – might this be the good wasp year everyone has been waiting for?

Alan Morris from Bayer Environmental Science predicts that if there is an insect explosion, DIY pest controllers will admit they can't cope and call in the professionals. As for rodents, Martina Flynn at Sorex suggests that the colder winter has forced more rodents indoors with the result that the public's tolerance level of pests is likely to rise. Bruce Blything at Industrial Pesticides identified the growing number of empty retail buildings as a new pest control challenge. Richard Lunn from SX Environmental agreed: "Someone used to look after all those Woolworth's stores. If the sites are empty they'll act like rodent magnets leading to more business."

Big is not seen as beautiful. Contracts with the big commercial companies are likely to be squeezed – food companies, retailers and hotel chains will be looking to save every penny. As Mark Rawsthorne of Paragon points out: "There is always someone out there prepared to do it for less. In these cases it's professionalism that will win the day." Dan Gaskin, a partner in Acclaim at Market Harborough adds: "It's up to us to educate our customers so they appreciate what we do."

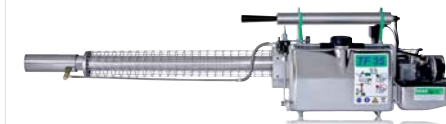
Professionalism and customer care are key

Private pest controllers generally felt that professionalism and customer care are key. Kris Plumley, managing partner in Alfreton-based ClearFirst Services said: "Companies who have put effort into caring for their customers will reap the rewards. But loyalty has to be earned. If your contract is based solely on price, you really need to ask if this is the right customer for you."

Personal service and attention to detail are also significant to Ricky Browning of Dorset-based Prevent Pest Control who said: "If you can offer personal service, organisations are prepared to give you a chance to prove yourself, especially if you can save them some money compared to the large national pest control organisations."

So, to conclude, it will certainly be a challenging year ahead. But it's not all doom and gloom – remember there are situations where legally pests must be controlled and, at the end of the day, not that many people are prepared to put up with pests. www.igeba.de

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