



The
Property
Institute

ADVICE NOTE

PEST CONTROL

Practical advice on dealing with pest control



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NOTE

As the leading trade body for residential leasehold management, TPI is also an important resource for leaseholders. Our Advice Notes cover a range of topics on the leasehold system to help leaseholders understand their rights and responsibilities and ultimately get the most out of living in their flat.

WHAT ARE PESTS?

Pests are categorised as plants or animals detrimental to humans or human concerns, with some species enjoying special legal protection or restrictions on the methods used for their control. An up-to-date understanding of the laws applying to pest control and an understanding of the correct methods to use to control each pest, is a fundamental part of being a Professional Pest Controller, and a key reason for using professional companies.

Pest rodents include brown rats, house mice and grey squirrels. Other problem mammals can include foxes, moles and badgers; although it should be noted that badgers have special protection by law.

Pest birds include feral pigeons, ring-necked parakeets and herring gulls. Pest insects include ants, bed bugs, carpet beetles, cockroaches, flies, clothes moths, stored product beetles, stored product moths, silverfish, wasps and woodlice. Bees can also cause problem, but honey bee and bumble bee nests should be relocated wherever possible, rather than destroyed.

If you have a pest problem – whose responsibility is dealing with it?

Anything that originates from the leaseholders demised property will need to be resolved by that leaseholder. For example, fleas from a cat or bed bugs brought back from holiday. The source of any infestation can be a very difficult thing to prove, especially if it is affecting other flats/tenants, and/or has been a long-standing problem that has been allowed to spread without being properly addressed.

A specialist contractor may need to be instructed to carry out a survey and/or investigation of how a problem may have originated, and how it can be resolved. These surveys will often be free-of-charge, but if a cost is involved for treatment within a leaseholders property, the leaseholder(s) may be required to cover the cost of that investigation. It is important to get the issue investigated as quickly as possible and not wait for the situation to get worse.

The managing agent, acting on behalf of the freehold, is responsible for an infestation that is located or caused within the building structure or communal areas. Please refer to the lease for the definition of the structure/communal areas. If this breach then causes an issue inside the leaseholders flat, then this would fall under the same responsibility. However, determining the cause of an infestation issue is not always easy, and it is of primary importance to ensure the issue gets resolved quickly to avoid it spreading to other tenanted properties, and leading to further costs.

Who to call in the event of an infestation

This will depend on the issue that has arisen.

Local Authority

Refer to the specific Local Authority's website, to highlight their pest control policy. It will usually define a small group of pests that they deal with (e.g. rats and mice) and will make a charge for dealing with

those issues. For pests that are not covered, you will need to deal with a private contractor.

Private Contractors

The British Pest Control Association (BPCA) and National Pest Technician's Association (NPTA) are both trade associations for the pest control industry, and have search facilities for local approved contractors. Membership of the BPCA is limited to those companies who meet the membership criteria, including; the holding of relevant pest control qualifications for all staff, relevant insurance cover, and membership of the Basis Prompt Continuous Professional Development Scheme, to ensure ongoing training and development of staff.

DIY

There are some products available for amateur use that may help address occasional pest problems within a property. This can include aerosol insecticidal products for amateur use, moth lures etc. Always follow the label instructions carefully, and take care to keep children and pets out of treatment areas if the label advises to do so.

Tackling rodent problems can be difficult without professional advice, and delaying contacting professionals can lead to situations getting worse. There is currently a stewardship scheme operating to control the purchasing and use of rodenticides, which means that professional use products can only be purchased by professional pest controllers holding an appropriate industry- recognised qualification. Professional operators will be trained to ensure compliance with label and COSHH legal requirements, and to use methods and materials appropriate to any site-specific risks identified to humans and other animals.

Please be aware that any measures to control feral pigeons that could affect the outward appearance of the building or require structural modifications to it, may require permission from your managing agent.



CONTROL OF KEY PEST SPECIES

Vertebrates – Rodents

Rats

The brown rat is common and widespread in the UK; living in sewers, in and around farms, and in urban areas. Adults have an average body weight of 500 grams. They are omnivorous but prefer cereal products, and will eat around one tenth of their body weight each day. They also require access to a source of water. Access into buildings is usually via faulty drains, or structural defects leaving gaps/holes of 2cm or above. Rats have the capability to spread many human pathogens including various food poisoning agents and Weil's Disease (Leptospirosis). They can cause considerable structural damage, contaminate food and surfaces, and will cause stress and fear.

Keep perimeter areas tidy and clear of low-growing vegetation that can provide cover for rat burrows, and can trap rubbish etc. to provide an ideal habitat for rats to forage in. It is particularly important to keep bin areas tidy with lids that close firmly, and have well-fitted drain covers. Maintain properties to block holes and structural defects with rodent-proof materials to prevent rodent entry. Professional intervention will usually be required to control rats with traps and/or rodenticides, and drain problems will usually require expert investigation. Many pest control companies can arrange for CCTV Drain surveys and the fitting of one way drain valves. In some areas refuse collectors will not collect from bin rooms where rats are evident and in these instances pest control companies that are waste carriers can provide clearances. Consideration should be given to regular pest control inspections in external bin and landscaped areas.

Mice

The house mouse is very common in urban environments especially in inner city areas. It is brown/grey in colour and is very small – weighing between 10 and 25 grams, only requiring 3 grams (half a teaspoon) of food per day.

They are omnivorous, and can usually survive without access to a source of water. They are nervous feeders and take small quantities of food from many locations. Mice are incontinent and will leave droppings as evidence of all locations they have visited. They can gain access to properties through tiny gaps of just 6mm or above. If a pencil fits through a gap then so can a mouse. They are also capable of spreading human pathogens including food poisoning agents, and causing structural damage, contamination of food and surfaces, and considerable stress and fear. In rural areas, the closely related field mouse will sometimes gain access to properties in autumn and winter and cause similar problems.

Blocking structural gaps and holes around buildings is a key part of controlling mouse problems. Keep perimeter, bin and indoor areas clean and tidy to avoid providing food and nesting areas for pests. Professional intervention will usually be required to control mouse problems using traps and/or rodenticides. Areas of most concern in domestic dwellings are often behind kitchen kickboards, bathroom panels, under stair cupboards and water tank airing cupboards. In blocks of flats mains services and lift riser cupboards should be regularly checked.

Grey squirrels

The grey squirrel is an introduced forest plantation pest from North America, and will often gain access to roof spaces via building defects to nest and cause damage to roof timbers, electrical wiring and plumbing. The damage caused by squirrels is often far greater than that caused by rats. It is illegal to release trapped grey squirrels into the wild, and control should be carried out by a professional pest control operator, who can also advise on blocking high-level access holes to stop these pests from getting into the roof space.

Vertebrates – Birds

All birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, although exceptions can be made for certain listed species (including feral pigeons), under the terms and conditions of a General Licence. For lethal control of feral pigeons, all conditions of the licence must be met, which include demonstrating that other non-lethal methods of control have been considered and are not feasible.

Droppings can be a source of both contamination and food poisoning pathogens, and can add considerably to the cleaning costs of buildings.

Feral pigeons

Feral pigeons are messy scavengers, leaving droppings wherever they feed and roost. First consideration for control of feral pigeons should be to either prevent their access to the preferred roosting site or to scare them away. For balconies, the most effective method is to use professionally fitted nylon netting to prevent pigeon access, although suitability of sites for netting will vary and there are a wide range of other techniques available. Professionally fitted nets do not detract from the external aesthetics of a building, and do not restrict light entering balconies. Tenants will often prefer the netting to the pigeon fouling! Bird spikes and bird wire is a well tried and tested technique for repelling light infestations of birds from window ledges and string courses.

A more recent problem is feral pigeons nesting underneath solar panels, and blocking these access holes can be a very skilled process. The use of hawks flown professionally to deter birds is another popular deterrent method where sites are suitable.

If prevention or repelling of pest birds is not feasible, then the suitability of the site for lethal control by shooting can be professionally evaluated. This will be carried out by trained marksmen who will always have notified the local police.

Herring gulls

Gulls can be extremely noisy, messy, and very aggressive when defending their young. Removal of nests and eggs is permitted by the General Licence, but removal of young birds and adults is prohibited. Careful evaluation of the correct control method needs to be carried out early in the nesting season. Physical restraints such as spikes, wires, netting and wire mesh; are often the preferred method of preventing bird access to roosting areas. Other methods including lasers, mini-electric shock, water jetting and hawking; can also be considered.

Invertebrates – Insects

Most insects that enter your home are not pests and will have done so accidentally, so they can often be simply moved or re-directed back outside. However, there are some insects that can cause more serious issues, and these are summarised below. Obtaining a correct identification so that the right treatment action can be taken, will help enable prompt resolution of issues and prevent them from spreading. If in doubt or if you feel that you are failing to gain control of an insect problem, seek professional advice. Many professional pest control operators will offer a free identification service.



Ants

Garden ant problems in spring and summer are best controlled by using insecticidal baits that can be taken back to the nest by the worker ants to control the queens. However, there are other species of ants (such as pharaoh ants) that can be a problem in residential buildings where they may disperse over several floors making them a lot harder to control. These ant species will require professional intervention to control them.

Bed bugs

Bed bugs are flattened insects approximately 5mm in size when adult, that feed purely on blood and can leave very unpleasant bite marks. However, on individuals who are used to being bitten, they may leave very little mark at all. They usually feed once per week at night, and then retreat to a safe area to hide until the next feed. The key to dealing with bed bug problems is to get something done quickly and professionally, to prevent their spread to other areas.

There are a very wide variety of techniques available for bed bug monitoring and control, ranging from; insecticidal sprays and dusts, non-insecticidal dust treatments, barrier tape and specialist monitors, heat treatment etc.

A combination of methods may be required depending on the individual circumstances. For bed bug problems, it is essential to ensure there is access to check all potentially infested areas, including neighbouring flats and properties above and below where problems have been identified. It should be noted that although it is possible to find 'centres of infestation' it is not always possible to confirm that this is the place the infestation originated from.

Bees

Wherever possible, it is better to relocate bee nests rather than destroy them.

- For honey bees, seek advice from a bee-keeper via the British Beekeepers Association (www.bbka.org.uk).

- For bumble bees, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust (www.bumblebeeconservation.org) is best consulted.

The presence of masonry bees usually indicates that mortar and brickwork are in poor condition and in need of repair or re-pointing, and this is best carried out once the breeding season is over.

Carpet beetles/ clothes moths

These are textile pests that can leave small holes in your clothing and carpets. Clothes moths are small golden moths (not the larger harmless ones that sometimes fly in through the window on warm summer nights) and carpet beetles are tiny multi-coloured beetles looking a little bit like very small ladybirds. The adult moths and beetles do not do the damage, it is the larvae (tiny caterpillar-like grubs) that damage/eat natural fibres.

Control is best achieved by careful checking of all natural-fibre clothing items and either discarding damaged items, or using a label-approved hot washing or freezing method to kill any eggs or insects that might be present. Moth lures can be purchased to monitor for the presence of clothes moth, and can indicate when treatment is needed. Insecticidal treatment of infested carpeted areas can sometimes be beneficial. Problems with infested natural fibre insulation material can sometimes lead to more serious ongoing issues. Quite often pest controllers are called in to deal with moth infestations within common areas (lobbies, stairwells etc), but it should be recognised that the infestation will usually originate from within one or more flats, which is why the pest operatives will often recommend a full survey of all flats.

Cockroaches

Primitive insects that have little changed in 200 million years. Two main species are found in the UK; oriental cockroach and german cockroach. They are both nocturnal, and very good at hiding in cracks and crevices. Knowing where to look is the key to controlling these species, and you are advised to seek professional advice to prevent their spread to other areas. Sticky cardboard insect monitors can be purchased and placed around rooms, particularly kitchens, to detect signs of cockroach activity and indicate that a professional treatment may be needed.

Fleas

If pets are present, then seek veterinary advice on how to control fleas on your pet.

If fleas are suspected of biting people after a property which previously held animals has been vacated for some time, then seek professional advice and treatment. For long term survival, fleas require the host animal (usually dog or cat) to be present. Severe infestation problems can take time to fully control, but the absence of the host animal will mean that the fleas will eventually die out.

Flies

There are many different species of fly, but they all require a source of warmth and moisture for their maggots/larvae to survive once eggs have hatched. A sudden increase in numbers of one

type of fly could indicate a very specific problem. For example; drain flies might indicate a blocked drain or leak, fruit flies might indicate the presence of vinegary wine spillage or rotting fruit, house flies could indicate dirty dustbins, and blowflies usually indicate the presence of meat or a dead animal. Professional identification of the fly species involved is the key to successful treatment.

Stored product beetles and moths

There are many different insect species but they usually have one thing in common. If you can find the food item that is infested and remove it, then in most situations, you will have resolved the problem. If you cannot find where the insects are coming from, then seek professional advice.

Silverfish

Small primitive insects that like to feed on starchy food residues such as that found under linoleum floor tiles in a kitchen or bathroom. Reduction in heat and humidity is the key to control. Professional insecticidal treatment can help in these situations.

Wasps

In spring and early summer, wasps cause very little problem and are usually beneficial to gardeners by removing pest insects. However, come late summer when the nests get a lot bigger they are potentially very dangerous, and you can get badly stung if you get too close to them. Having located the nest, you therefore need to either leave it alone or seek professional advice to eliminate it. Wasps do not re-use their nests, they build a new one each year, so old wasp nests found in an attic or loft space in January or February can usually be safely removed with fear of attack.

Woodlice

Strictly speaking these are land-dwelling crustaceans and not insects. They like dark damp areas, and are often a problem in buildings which have a lot of vegetation growing on the outside. Once inside, they tend to die quickly due to desiccation. A thin layer of a non-toxic desiccant powder placed just under the carpet edge by the front door, will often provide a sufficient barrier to deter invasion.

Health and safety issues

The safety issues that can arise from treating pests are wide and varied, and the following points of advice should be noted:

- Act promptly to prevent an infestation from spreading to other areas, and ensure that there is full access to the areas identified as potentially having a problem.
- Check that your proposed contractor is a member of a recognised trade association, such as the British Pest Control Association. (BPCA) or the Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH).
- Contact your managing agent and/or local authority if the problem is outside the boundary of your property, or has already spread to areas beyond your property.

What service standard is usual in a pest control contract

The number and frequency of site visits can vary enormously, as can pest control material costs (such as bait boxes, insecticides and monitoring tools); and you may need to compare and negotiate when obtaining cost estimates.

A few points to note:

- The Prevention of Damage by Pest Act 1949 gives suitably authorised people (the Local Authorities) the right to inspect any premises and as a property owner you are required to keep your property vermin free; failure to do so may lead to legal action, forced business closure and fines.
- The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 provides protection to certain species, and pest control activities must adhere to these regulations.
- Avoid contractors offering one visit treatments for rodent control, as there is a legal requirement to follow-up and search for rodent bodies if rodenticides have been used, and to adhere to good practice by removing all rodenticides on the final site visit. In general rodent treatments should be a minimum of 3 visits. Most pests in single dwelling units will be treated as one off job treatments (comprising of specified numbers of visits). If there is a problem with re-infestation then an annual ongoing contract will be recommended.
- Some pests are harder to eliminate than others (for example; bed bugs and pharaoh ants), and treatment programs and visit frequencies are likely to reflect this.
- Local Authorities may provide a comparative charging structure for some pests.
- Most contractors can now provide online reporting so that reports can be emailed to off-site landowners and managers if required to do so.
- The Duty of Care regulations under the Environmental Protection Act 1980 mandates proper disposal of waste, including that generated from pest control activities.



Further information and references

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health website provide an excellent free-to-download guide called 'Pest control procedures in the Housing Sector'. It covers all the major pests, legal aspects of their control, safety concerns, and gives a detailed breakdown of pest prevention and control.

The following websites also offer a wide variety of helpful material:

- British Pest Control Association (BPCA) www.bpca.org.uk
- Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH)
- National Pest Technician's Association (NPTA) www.npta.org.uk
- Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) www.cieh.org
- Basis Registration Ltd – Basis Prompt Scheme for Continuous Professional Development <https://basis-prompt.co.uk/>

For bee problems – the following websites are useful:

- British Bee-Keepers Association www.bbka.org.uk
- The Bumblebee Conservation Trust www.bumblebeeconservation.org

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