SCRATCHING IN THE WALLS: KEEP PESTS OUT THIS FALL

As the days shorten and the temperatures cool, we snuggle up and spend more time indoors. But we're not the only ones looking for somewhere cozy. To go with the spookiness of Halloween, you may hear scratching within the walls. Critters are also looking for warmth and security. In areas of heavy development, mice in particular, look for safety.

"Mice are a big problem in the City of Toronto," says Shaw Haghgoo, CEO of Pest B Gone Canada Inc. "The issue is development. Every time the ground is dug up, we disturb their habitat. Anytime there is construction in the area, pest control measures should increase."

During the summer, mice will hide inside garbage areas and gardens. When it gets colder, they move inside buildings. If not treated, they gravitate towards units.

"Mice get in through garbage and recycling areas, compacting rooms, and underground parking areas. Once inside, an infestation can start."

RAPID BREEDERS

They breed quickly: Female mice can have up to 15 litters per year with an average litter size of 10 to 12 pups. To combat this threat, consistent attention through the use of regularly refreshed bait stations is essential.

"You need to have a variety of feed," says Haghgoo. "If you use the same bait consistently, it will not be as effective. This time of the year we like to use three different baits focusing on garbage room areas and underground parking. Some buildings have storage facilities connected to the underground; if that's the case, we will put a bait station there too."

Bait stations are small containers which give the rodents a sense of security. Once inside, they eat the bait and leave. "Based on the amount of bait that's left in there, we know how much activity there is," he says. "If you don't control them, you risk an infestation."

If mice escape from garbage areas into units, they now have a secure food source and can make their way through the building, traveling along hallways, and inside drop ceilings. They also travel along plumbing pipes in the kitchen area and electrical conduits. "Plumbing pipes are the most notorious because they have the largest gap around them."

Typically, Pest B Gone will perform monthly visits to monitor pest control in the common areas. If a mice situation escalates, or if a building is infested, they will be at the site strictly to address the mouse problem. Service calls are waived for clients on a maintenance contract and the cost to the property is minimal.

Rats need a different approach. "Rats are actually very clean animals. They live in filthy areas, but they like to be clean. Feeder stations must be regularly cleaned, and any debris emptied."

SPIDERS CAN BE BENEFICIAL

Fall is also when spiders transition somewhere warmer, preferring dark, dry places. Despite their potential benefit to the environment, not everyone likes them. "Spiders are beneficial because they are going to take care of flying insects. Both spiders and centipedes feed off other insects. If we do a spider treatment, we are going to kill other insects at the same time."

Common cockroaches are another concern. Treatment processes can be hampered when residents don't comply with requests to enter. In a condominium property, the corporation has the right to enter the unit to perform its duties provided that prior notice is given. While notices can be easily communicated to owners, not all owners live in their units—some are leased to tenants.

"That can be troublesome. People opt to ignore what we're asking them to do, and they don't answer the door. Property managers can only communicate with the owner, and the owner is responsible for their tenant. It's difficult for the property manager to get involved. If the owner is not in town, that makes it even more tricky."

Haghgoo suggests property managers make as much effort as possible to communicate the need to enter ahead of time: "Make sure everyone is aware. Post notices up everywhere—make it very clear that it is happening and the date it will occur."

If unable to get access to a unit, Pest B Gone will provide two alternative dates to return to the property to complete the building-wide treatment. If again there is no access, or the unit has not been prepared, there is a cost to return to the site which the corporation will typically charge back to the unit owner.

A HELPING HAND FOR ELDERLY & PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED RESIDENTS

Pest B Gone are empathetic regarding the prep work requirements. Understanding it can be difficult for the aged or those with physical impairments, Pest B Gone is one of the few companies who offer to help.

For cockroach bait and powder treatments, no preparation is needed other than removing everything from countertops. For a residual or fogging treatment with Actisol, all cabinets in the kitchen and bathroom must be emptied out. "A lot of people will take items from the cupboard and put them on the kitchen counter—that's not what we want," explains Haghgoo. "Depending on the circumstances, not everyone is able to prepare on their own. Many elderly people are incapable of reaching the upper cupboards, and most of them can't reach past the bottom shelf. In a total building treatment, I always have two other people with me. As long as the owner or tenant is there beside me and doesn't just leave the unit, we're going to work with them."

This is an uncommon service for the pest control industry. "We do it because it helps speed things up. By taking the extra step, it takes the burden off the Property Manager. The manager can't be expected to go in and help people clear their cupboards, the superintendent can't be expected to either. It's part of the service we offer."

Pest B Gone supplies exceptional service throughout the Greater Toronto and Hamilton region, including Kitchener/Waterloo.

Connect at **www.pbgcanada.ca** or **289-597-BUGS (2847)**

***Shaw Haghgoo** is **CEO of Pest B Gone, Canada Inc.**, a leading provider of structural pest management services. "We have established the highest of standards in the pest control industry, and work to push the limit of that every day."*