

# Technical Training for Pest Management Professionals in Food Processing Facilities

by: Patricia Hottel, Technical Director & Anna Getchell, Operations Process Manager

## Introduction

In order to effectively perform pest management in a food plant, the pest management professional (PMP) needs to be knowledgeable in pests and their control within the complexity of the food processing environment. Specialized training is needed to prepare the service specialist for these challenges. We can break down the special training needs into several categories to include: general food safety knowledge, worker safety, regulations, third party audit standards, food plant processing systems and equipment and specific corporate policies and procedures.

## General Food Safety Knowledge

Because pest management professionals work with pests and pest control devices, some of their tools can harbor food contaminants and improper handling can lead to contamination. It is essential that the pest management professional understands general food safety hazards and takes precautions to prevent the contamination of food and food processing surfaces during service. The PMP needs to follow common hygienic practices such as washing of hands, and use of hair nets, and also understand the importance of reducing contaminants through their actions in the course of service. The PMP is the expert in pest management service and suited to perform that hazard analysis. For example, the service specialist should know that even though they wear gloves for service, potential contaminants can be transferred to their mobile recording devices and flashlight with their gloved hands. They need to decontaminate these tools just as they would their hands and boots when entering a sensitive food environment. Being trained in general food safety can help with awareness and risk analysis.



The order of service within a specific site and careful review regarding the type previous sites visited is an important consideration in preserving food safety. So, checking exterior rodent equipment at the end of service can be valuable in reducing the tracking in of potential contaminants into a more sensitive interior environment. Inside, the service order should be most sensitive to least sensitive to reduce contamination spread. There should be consideration of allergen and allergen control plans in the order of service at a client site and previously visited external sites. A PMP should understand that going from a peanut butter processing plant to a peanut free cookie bakery could be problematic. In addition, there should be consideration regarding the sensitivity of one site or plant versus another. Servicing a site which produces infant formula should be serviced before a hog rendering plant.

## Worker Safety

Worker safety and regulatory compliance is another important training element. There are certain safety compliance requirements, more commonly encountered in a food plant, than other types of facilities a PMP may service. Examples include: lock out tag out, confined space entry permits and working around heights. These have more relevance in the manufacturing environment than other types of commercial sites. Workers must have the proper training in these topics for their protection, protection of others and for regulatory compliance. Some pest management professionals will include OSHA 10 hour course completion as part of this training requirement.



## Regulations, Third Party Audit Standards and Corporate Standards

Food plant PMP's must be knowledgeable in food safety and other governmental regulations which impact pest management. There are pesticide regulations both on the Federal and State level which require compliance and training.

Depending on the type of facilities serviced, additional regulations specific to a particular plant may require specialized training. Organic processing plants following USDA's National Organic Program would require special compliance training for PMP's in those facilities. Meat and poultry plants would likewise have some additional restrictions on pesticides used in those sites, specifically regarding coloring of pesticide baits used. Lastly, facilities may have allergen control plans under the Federal Allergen Labeling Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA) and the design and execution of a pest management program in compliance with a plant's plan is needed.

Some sites may have environmental accreditation programs established such as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). The PMP will need training in LEED requirements and specialized programs will need to be designed and followed.

From a food safety standpoint, pest management is part of the food safety regulations. Understanding FDA rules such as the Food Modernization and Safety Act and its preventative requirements will help insure compliance. PMP's must also be educated and experience in third party audit requirements to make sure that these requirements are met for the pest management portion. In addition, there may be certain client requirements from a corporate level which must be satisfied such as an approved materials list. The first step in complying with all these requirements is education.

## Communication Skills and Specialized Knowledge

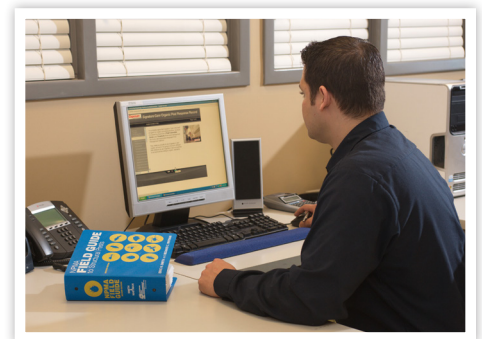
Knowing the language and equipment of the food processing industry is important for communication and problem solving. Recognizing the name of equipment by type is helpful in communicating to the client when a pest problem is found in that equipment. Knowing the function of the equipment is important in determining the potential for pests in the equipment. In addition to knowing general industry terms, there is a need to know the plant's terminology. For example, it is important that a pest management professional servicing a dry processing facility, understand the function of a dust collector and what it looks like so he or she can use that knowledge in their search for pests. Secondly, knowing the names of equipment is important in communicating findings. The plant may have individual terminology for specific production lines. The PMP will need to know that it is a roller conveyor and that the conveyor is part of line 6 at that plant. Good communication is key in partnering with the food plant staff to maintain and develop an effective pest management program and strong relationship. Using food industry language and specific food plant terminology is critical in fostering that partnership.



## What does an Initial Training Program Look Like?

Typically there are two types of training that occur within a pest management firm: initial training for new hires and continuing education for existing employees.

There are many safety risks that a new employee is exposed to from the beginning of their career in pest management. To ensure that they are aware of the risks that surround them, initial training should include a safe driving course and the OSHA 10-Hour course (or similar). Completion of these safety courses will ensure that they can complete the most foundational elements of their career (driving and entering clients' facilities) safely. The completion of these courses should occur before any on-site training takes place.



Adult learners typically learn best with hands-on exercises. While the safety courses are often best completed in an online module, the basic pest management skills should be introduced with field visits that are supplemented with classroom talks, online modules, or reading. The site visits will serve as the new employee's first exposure to their new job, and there is a lot to be taken away from these experiences:

- Customer interaction
- Hazard analysis of the facility
- Pests typical of the type of facility (food processing or otherwise)
- Pest harborage typical of the type of facility (inside equipment, certain pest vulnerable zones)
- Inspection process
- GMPs and steps taken to maintain food safety
- Devices that we use to monitor and/or control pests
- PPE that we use per the client's requirements, the pesticide label, or company policies
- Pesticide mixing and application

Classroom training and online modules specific to elements (such as baiting for cockroaches or recording conditions on your handheld) will re-inforce and support the learning that took place in the field. Exposure to these experiences over and over again will help the new employee to become more comfortable and skilled.

After the new employee has visited sites for exposure to the elements of their job, it's time to train on specific hands-on skills. Called "On the Job Training" or "OJTs," these are one-on-one trainings between the new employee and their supervisor designed to take the foundational exposure they received in the classroom and at site visits and actually demonstrate the skill. The trainer will show the new employee a specific skill (such as using a duster or servicing a school). The new employee will demonstrate the skill until the trainer feels the new employee is competent at it.

As the new hire completes OJTs, they will also be introduced to their specific pest management route. Introductions between the new technician and the client are vital so that both parties feel confident. The new employee needs to be shown the areas of concern at the facility and know who to contact, as well as subtle facility-specific nuances. Introducing the new employee to the client will ease the client's mind, as well.

Initial training will continue as different skills and environments are introduced. The process will take at least 30 days, often as long as a year. Frequent attention should be paid to the new employee in terms of evaluations and coaching and conversations. Only by seeing the employee in action and talking with them about their concerns can we continue to improve them.



## What does a Continuing Education Program Look Like?

From a continuing education standpoint, topics should include, at a minimum, worker safety updates and technical topics.

Worker safety topic selection will need to be in compliance with OSHA requirements for mandated annual, periodic or designated training due to changes in equipment or processes. In addition, topics may be selected based on hazard analysis of the site visited. Working around the hazards of truck traffic at receiving and shipping docks is one form of training that might be indicated based on a hazard analysis. Special training for the hazards present in a freezer environment would be another example.

Technical topics should include a review of new technologies to insure that the best products and strategies are used in preventing and solving pest problems as innovation occurs. Product manufacturers can play a role in training the pest management firms to which they supply in classroom settings. Label quizzes to confirm product knowledge for pesticide use are advised when a new product is introduced or the label is revised. Food safety refresher training should be included in the list of topics on an ongoing basis.

In addition to new products and technologies, there can be updates on pests to focus on during continuing education. Quite often, seasonal pests are reviewed as part of the training program. New research relevant to the control of a specific pest or newly introduced invasive species is of particular importance. An example would be training on bed bugs as we have seen resurgence in bed bug activity. The invasive species, the brown marmorated stink bug has continued to enlarge its geographical distribution and should be discussed in areas where it has become more prevalent.

To accomplish the training, there are a variety of tools available. Online training and classroom training are the mainstays of most programs. There are several organizations offering online pest management technical training including Copesan Services, National Pest Control Association and Pest Control Technology magazine. There are several companies specializing in safety training offering online worker safety training as well.

## Conclusion

No matter the field, entering a new career poses many challenges. Through proper training, we are essentially identifying those challenges and mitigating them as best we can. A smooth training plan for a new employee means they are eased into their new role, not thrown into it. They will develop the confidence and skill to handle the pest situations that come their way. A pest management professional working in food processing facilities must continuously improve their skills in order to provide the food safety that the industry demands.



# Technical Training for Pest Management Professionals in Food Processing Facilities

## About the Authors

### Patricia Hottel, BCE - Technical Director, McCloud Services



Patricia Hottel is technical director at McCloud Services and has over 35 years of pest management industry experience. Hottel is a board certified entomologist and a member of the National Pest Management Association's Commercial and Fumigation Committees. She is also a former member of the board of directors of the National Pest Management Association (NPMA) and the Illinois Pest Control Association (IPCA). She has served on the board of directors for the professional pest management fraternity, Pi Chi Omega, is a past chair and current member of the Copesan Technical Committee, is a past chair of NPMA's exam review board, and the NPMA Technical Committee. Hottel holds a bachelor's degree in entomology from the University of Georgia and a master's degree in instructional technology from the University of Central Missouri.

### Anna Getchell - Operations Process Manager, McCloud Services



Anna Getchell is operations process manager at McCloud Services. She is a member of the Entomological Society of America and is certified in HACCP and ServSafe. Getchell holds a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Oregon and a master's degree in grain science from Kansas State University.

## About McCloud Services

Founded in 1904, McCloud Services, based in South Elgin, Ill., is the leader in food protection services throughout the chain of custody – from grain elevator to grocery store. McCloud Services is known for its integrated approach to pest management, specifically designed for the food supply chain of custody. Serving the largest food-related brands in the U.S., the company has earned a reputation as the “food protection experts.” McCloud Services has locations in 11 states with nine service centers.

McCloud Services is a founding member and shareholder in Copesan, an alliance of premier pest management companies with locations throughout North America. Headquartered in South Elgin, Illinois, McCloud Services has locations in Illinois as well as throughout Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Tennessee, Ohio and Wisconsin.

For more information, please visit [www.mccloudservices.com](http://www.mccloudservices.com)