

Attention to Detail

By Richard D. Kramer, Ph.D., BCE

One thing that continues to amaze me is that only a few pest management companies pay attention to the details. I'm not talking about getting the bid right, complying with regulations, or filling out your service ticket correctly. As professionals, it is our job to solve the customer's pest problems, not just kill pests.

I find many companies are content solving the customer's problem by applying the product, and in some cases throwing around some traps. The spray and pray approach – kills pests but doesn't solve the problem. As they head out the door, check in hand, the technician can be heard saying, call us if you have any more problems – of course, additional charges may (usually do) apply.

This practice is not only unprofessional and a disservice to your customer, but it is a missed opportunity to resolve the pest problem indefinitely. More importantly, it is an opportunity to make a lot more money by providing the necessary service.

Most of you are familiar with the pest triangle of life (food, harborage, and water) and know that if we eliminate one or more of these elements, we significantly impact the pest's ability to survive. Furthermore, IPM stresses the management of these resources as the first line of attack for most pest problems.

Many companies' approach to managing these resources is to ask the customer to correct the contributing factors. Even when customers are provided well-intended instructions and fact sheets, there are three potential customer outcomes (in increasing order of likelihood):

- They'll do what needs to be done.
- They'll attempt to do what needs to be done.
- They won't do a thing because it's your job to kill their bugs.

Most pests we encounter originate on the exterior of the structure, and there are many things we can do to minimize their entry into structures and eliminate their harborage sites:

- Install door sweeps (mice and arthropods).
- Install weep vent material (wasp nests and crawling arthropods).
- Caulk/seal expansion joints (mice, crawling arthropods, and ant nests).
- Seal around pipe, wire, and other wall penetrations (wasp nests and crawling arthropods).
- Caulk around roof flashing (bats and wasp nests).
- Foam pipe openings on chain link and other fencing materials (wasp nests).
- Install wire mesh behind intake vents, under tree guards, and in planter boxes (mouse/rat nesting and entry).
- Caulk/seal around windows and doors (crawling arthropods).

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- Change exterior lighting to yellow bug lights (flying insects).
- Install chimney caps (raccoons, opossums, birds).
- Replace animal-resistant vents or screen off vents (birds and small animals).

Likewise, indoors, there are many things pest management professionals can do to eliminate pest problems:

- Steam clean in commercial kitchens to remove accumulated residues (rats, mice, and cockroaches).

- Clean trash compactors, trash rooms, and trash chutes (mice and cockroaches).

- Clean drains with brushes, bio-cleaners, and/or steam (drain, hump-backed, and other small flies).

- Seal cracks and crevices used as cockroach harborage (Caution: some sealing can create additional harborages more difficult to inspect and treat).

- Seal wall penetrations (rats, mice, and cockroaches).

- Seal around base cabinet pipe chases, gas line, dishwasher drain hoses, wires, and other penetrations (rats, mice, and cockroaches).

- Seal base cabinet voids at the top, corners, and joints of the kick plate (cockroaches, mice, and rats).

- Put flashing around ceiling penetrations (rats and insects).

- Inspect abandoned and rubber cap “sealed” drain lines and stack pipes – rats frequently chew through them – replace rubber cap with a hard plastic or metal cap.

- Screen or use copper

stuff it in unused drains (cockroaches).

This in no way is intended to be a comprehensive list of add-on services we can provide as pest management service companies to help mitigate pests in our accounts. Most of these services don’t require any technical knowledge or skill and can be performed with very little training. The success of this type of work demands a working knowledge of pest habits and a great deal of attention to detail.

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MISSION STATEMENT - The mission of the Virginia Pest Management Association is to promote ethical and environmentally responsible pest management practices among our members through education, coalition and professionalism to safely protect the general public.

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Immediate Past President's Message:

Fall: a Season of Growth, Learning, and Preparation for What's Ahead



As we move through the fall season, many of us in our industry notice the pace of work shifting. The busy summer months—filled with constant calls, full routes, and long days—are slower. For many of us, this is when we finally get a chance to pause, catch our breath, and refocus on the things that strengthen our businesses and our teams.

One of the best uses of this time is training. Training sharpens our technical skills, prepares us for future challenges, and builds confidence across our organizations. When our people are better equipped, our companies are stronger. That's why VPMA continues to prioritize meaningful training opportunities for our members. This fall, we have hosted a robust lineup designed to meet the needs of technicians, managers, and owners alike.

Master Technician Series: Sept. 23 & 24

In September, we hosted the Master Technician Rodents and Pest Flies in at the Hampton Roads AREC. These sessions, led by industry experts, gave participants practical knowledge while bringing them one step closer to becoming a VPMA Master Technician—a respected credential that sets you apart in our industry. We added 6 new Master Technicians in September from Accel Pest and Termite and Getem Services.

WDI Inspector Workshop: October 2

In early October, VPMA hosted the Certified WDI Inspector Workshop in Virginia Beach. This training equips pest professionals to perform consistent, reliable inspections. It covers wood-destroying pest identification, biology, conducive

conditions, construction basics, and inspection techniques, as well as detailed guidance on completing the NPMA-33 form.

This certification is invaluable for building credibility in real estate transactions and with customers who depend on accurate inspections. At our October training, we certified 8 new WDI Inspectors from 10 companies:

- Accel Pest & Termite
- All-Stars Pest Control Comfort Crawl and Pest
- Getem Service
- Meadow Lawn & Pest
- Mike's Pest, Termite and Wildlife Control
- Neely Pest Control Inc.
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Virginia Pest Management Summit: Nov. 12–13

The highlight of our fall calendar was the Summit. We will provide a full recounting of the Summit in our next newsletter. Formerly called the State Technical Meeting, and in its' 20th year, the Summit brought together pest management professionals from across the Commonwealth for education, networking, and industry updates.

The first day of the Summit focused on management topics, offering owners and managers insights into leadership, business growth, and industry trends. The second day focused on technical training, with sessions tailored to technicians and field staff, giving them the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and stay current on best practices.

Category 8 Prep Course & Exam: November 11

This year, we also added a special opportunity the day before the Summit. On Tuesday, November 11, VPMA hosted a Category 8 Prep Course, followed immediately by a proctored Category 8 exam.

As you know, Category 8 covers ticks, mosquitoes, and a wide range of vector control measures. It is one of the most challenging categories to obtain, but also one of the most critical to our work. VPMA last offered this prep-and-test event in 2019, and it was extremely successful. With 45 people in attendance, and with the assistance of a great training team and VDACS, we are able to

hit a 100% pass rate for the tests taken last week!

Closing Thoughts

As the pace of daily work eases this fall, I encourage you to seize the opportunity. Use this season to reinvest in your people, your business, and your future. VPMA is committed to providing opportunities that elevate our industry and equip every member—whether technician, manager, or owner—for long-term success.

Together, let's make this fall a season of growth, learning, and preparation for what's ahead.

— John C. Reid

Immediate Past President, VPMA

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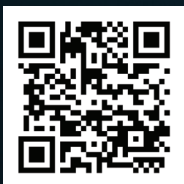
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- Grant your employer access to your record and authorize changes on your behalf

Having access to your account helps YOU stay on top of your expiration dates and know when it's time to attend a recertification training. All applicator certificates expire on June 30 of either even or odd years, so your online portal makes it easy to track your renewal timeline.

How to Access Your Online Account

To get started, applicators can contact OPS at any time throughout the year to request access:

Email: opsclrt.vdacs@vdacs.virginia.gov

Include the following information in your request:

- Full name
- Certificate number
- Date of birth
- Last five digits of your Social Security number
- Email address (must be personal/unique to you)

Please note: VDACS will not grant access to employers. Applicator records belong to the individual and may include personal information. However, once access is set up, you can grant

your employer permission to view your record.

System Improvements and Time-Saving Options

OPS continues to improve the online portal for better efficiency. Enhancements include:

- Auto-validation of applications for exams and business license renewals
- Direct transfer of test scores from DMV to OPS (no more manual data entry!)

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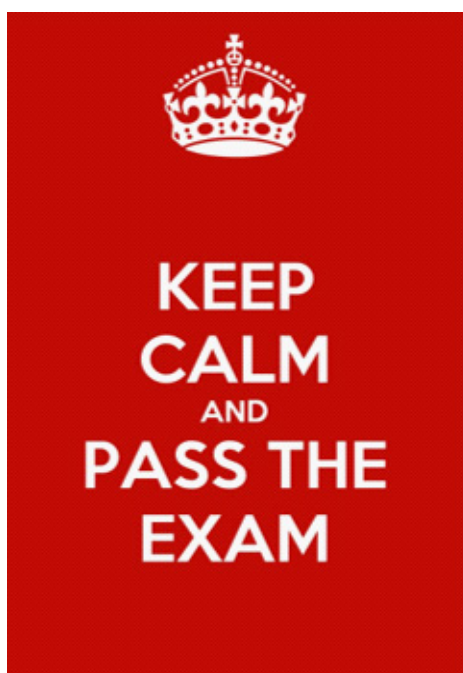
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- Proctored Testing by Pesticide Investigators is based upon availability.

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Applicators taking multiple exams must take them in one sitting!

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Pest Control Challenges and Strategies in a Warm Fall

By David Moore, II, BCE

As seasons change, most of us expect cooler fall temperatures to bring relief from summer pest pressures. However, when fall remains unusually warm, pest activity often continues well beyond its normal cycle which can create challenges for pest management professionals. Understanding how a warm fall affects pest behavior is the first step to managing infestations effectively.

Why Warm Falls Impact Pest Activity

A warm fall disrupts the natural seasonal cycle that usually helps keep pest populations in check. Normally, shorter days and cooler nights trigger insects to slow their activity, prepare for winter, or seek shelter. But when temperatures remain mild, there can be various consequences that we have to deal with. There can be an extended breeding season. Many insects, such as mosquitoes, flies, ants, and cockroaches, continue reproducing longer than usual. There can also be prolonged outdoor activity: Stinging pests like wasps and yellowjackets remain active, foraging for food late into the season. This means pest populations remain higher for longer, and infestations inside homes may be more severe once pests finally seek shelter.

Common Pests During a Warm Fall

1. **Ants:** Warmer weather allows colonies to forage later into the season. This often drives ants into homes seeking food when natural sources dwindle.

2. **Mosquitoes:** Extended warmth prolongs mosquito activity, raising risks of bites and disease transmission such as West Nile virus.

3. **Stinging Insects:** Yellowjackets and wasps thrive in warm fall weather, especially around outdoor gatherings. They become more aggressive



sive as natural food sources decline.

4. **Spiders and Overwintering Insects:** Box-elder bugs, stink bugs, and lady beetles enter homes later in the fall when warmth keeps them active longer outside.

Strategies for a Warm Fall

Pest management professionals can talk to homeowners about proactive steps to reduce infestations during extended warm periods.

1. **Sealing Entry Points:** Inspect doors, windows, siding, and rooflines for cracks or gaps. Install weatherstripping and door sweeps. Repair torn screens and seal utility line gaps.

2. **Removing Attractants:** Keep kitchens clean and food sealed tightly. Dispose of trash regularly and use lidded bins. Reduce outdoor attractants such as ripe fruit, standing water, or uncovered pet food.

3. **Landscape Maintenance:** Trim shrubs and trees away from buildings. Remove leaf piles and yard debris that harbor insects and rodents. Keep

grass trimmed to reduce harborage areas.

5. You can recommend proactive treatments as well- Barrier treatments for ants, spiders, and crawling insects. Targeted wasp/yellowjacket nest removal for safety around homes and businesses. Additional treatments for overwintering pests before they start coming into a structure in large numbers.

Preparing for the Season Ahead

Even during a warm fall, cold weather will eventually arrive—and pests will look for warmth and shelter indoors. Taking preventive measures now reduces the risk of infestations that can persist through the winter months.

Talk to your customers about adopting a year-round pest management plan that accounts for unpredictable seasonal changes. This ensures that whether fall stays warm or winter comes early, homes and businesses remain protected.

A warm fall extends pest pressure well beyond the usual season. By combining preventive steps, monitoring, and professional pest control, property owners can stay ahead of infestations and enjoy the season without unwanted invaders.

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How to Get Rid of Odorous House Ants

By Samantha Dilday

Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the April print version of PCT under the headline "Tell Odorous House Ants to 'Smell Ya' Later'" Reprinted with permission from PCT eNews Today, July 9, 2025. All photos compliments of Samantha Dilday.

When it comes to the most difficult-to-control pests that pest management professionals (PMPs) encounter, few insects are as resourceful and irritating as the odorous house ant (OHA). Known for their characteristic smell and ability to establish sprawling colonies indoors and outdoors, these ants have become a significant headache for PMPs across the country. Companies encounter these pests in homes, restaurants and commercial buildings, making them a year-round challenge. By understanding their behavior, colony dynamics and effective control measures, you can turn this smelly problem into a manageable one. Let's take a closer look at what makes these ants tick — and how to stay one step ahead.

Poludomous & Polygynous

Dr. Grzegorz Buczkowski, research associate professor in the department of entomology at Purdue University, has been researching this particular pest for 25 years and has noticed unusual behavior developing over that time.

"Around 2000, we started noticing some unusual behaviors in OHA," Buczkowski said. "Most importantly [we noticed] the

transition from small, single-queen, single-nest colonies in natural areas to large, multi-queen, multi-nest colonies in urban areas."

Odorous house ants are both polydomous — having multiple nests, and polygynous — having multiple queens. This makes them incredibly adaptable to city life. Whereas natural colonies in the forest may contain only a single queen and a few hundred workers, urban colonies can be made up of hundreds of reproductive queens and thousands of workers

spread among dozens of nests.

Scanning-electron microscope (SEM) image of an odorous house ant worker head featuring the 12-segmented antenna common in this species.

"OHA is a very adaptable species and ben-



Odorous House Ants (OHA), one of the most difficult to control pests that PMPs encounter.

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efits from urbanization, much like other urban wildlife pests such as rodents or pigeons,” he said.

Budding & Swarming

OHA colonies expand either by swarming — where winged-reproductives congregate in large numbers to mate — or by budding, where a queen leaves the nest to start fresh, leaving her reproductive daughters in charge of the old nest. This can lead to sprawling colonies of non-hostile, cooperative ants.

“The nests can be spread over a large area and a single colony may infest multiple structures,” Buczkowski said. “OHA is one of those ants that is fairly easy to control on a small scale, but nearly impossible to eradicate on a large scale.”

Treating a single nest won’t control extreme infestations as interconnecting nests will reestablish in vacant areas.

Foraging & Trailing

Outdoors, you’ll find OHAs nesting under rocks, fallen logs or rotting wood, but in urban settings, they’re as likely to set up shop in wall voids, stacked wood or food storage areas. Their nests are shallow, temporary and mobile — often moving every three weeks based on resources or weather.

Finding these nests can be especially challenging in urban environments. William Martinez, service technician at Venables Pest Management, Tumwater, Wash., said he knows just how difficult these ants can be. “They can get [into] places we can’t,” Martinez said. “And because of that, we can’t always gauge the true activity or the true problem.”

Properly inspecting for foraging trails and signs of activity can be the first step in determining the best course of action for tough ant problems. Unlike other ants that haul resources back



to their established nests, OHAs bring their brood to the food, saving them energy and contaminating our kitchens. These ants are around-the-clock foragers, active during the day and at night, with no clear peaks in activity. Even during colder months, OHAs seem to maintain a higher activity level compared to other ants. We may see a dip in calls related to this pest during the winter but come warmer weather they quickly become a nuisance to homeowners and businesses.

Starvation Resistance

Preliminary studies into OHAs’ starvation resistance have shown that small colonies of only a few reproductive queens can survive without food for more than 120 days. It was often noted that OHAs will resort to cannibalization of eggs and the brood in order to survive without food.

“OHAs are able to withstand long periods of starvation and lay dormant when the conditions for survival are not ideal,” Buczkowski said.

Rental properties in the U.S. have an average vacancy rate of 14% yearly, equating to more than 51 days with no tenants and/or food. Vacation homes can stay unoccupied for four to six months or more out of the year. In both cases, odorous house ant infestations can survive until resources are available once again when residents return. It’s important to emphasize that ant problems won’t magically go away because the residents have.

Tolerance to Pesticides

Managing OHAs can be tough. They’re resilient, adaptable and are frustratingly resistant to many insecticides.

“According to PMP surveys, OHA is one of the most challenging ants to control and has been voted the ‘number one callback ant,’” he said.

Maybe you’ve experienced a case where spraying for OHAs has led to more callbacks. In laboratory studies, OHAs were reported to be the hardest to kill with insecticides, as it took the longest time to reach 50% and 100% mortality compared to other ants. This low sensitivity to commonly used spray insecticides (such as bifenthrin, chlorfenapyr and fipronil) might explain

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"Phillis and I have a long-standing relationship. She is a wealth of knowledge and always has time to discuss how the pest control industry is doing and what direction we are going. She has been with us as we grew from a \$650,000-a-year company to now more than \$7 million annually. She has always made sure we are well protected and all our insurance needs are met to keep our company sound. The pricing has always been fair, and she and Frank are always available when I call."

— Randy Abbitt, President
National Exterminating Co.
of Newport News

Pictured: Frank and
Phillis MacDonald,
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why it is such a persistent pest.

“To achieve satisfactory control, species that have particularly low sensitivity to insecticides might require higher application rates, more frequent application intervals or both,” Buczkowski said.

To make matters worse, when insecticides are sprayed widely, they often eliminate other more vulnerable ant species, leaving OHAs behind. Without competition and with easier access to nesting and food resources, OHAs can take over and spread into areas where other ants once thrived.

“Additionally, there is some early evidence that OHAs can evade toxic baits and collectively respond to dangerous substances and situations,” Buczkowski said. “Colonies that feed on toxic baits may associate baits with mortality risk and avoid feeding.”

He added that more research into their biology needs to be done to better understand this phenomenon.

Best Management Practices

Anyone who has had a customer with an OHA problem can easily understand the difficulty controlling them. But what tools and best practices do we currently have to help manage infestations?

First steps in treating an ant problem should always be properly identifying the species. OHAs can be identified in the field using multiple key features of the workers. Workers are usually uniform in size, ranging from 1/16 inch to 1/18 inch and vary in color from black to brown.

A unique characteristic of this species is the single, button-like node that is usually hidden from view under the abdomen. The antennae will have 12 segments without an enlarged tip and the abdominal orifice will be slit-like without a ring of fringe hairs surrounding it.

While these ants are named for their funky smell, don’t let just your nose do the identifying. Other ant species may produce a similar pheromone and can be easily misidentified as OHAs.

Once OHAs have been properly identified,

steps can then be taken to develop a treatment plan. “The most effective method of dealing with OHAs is not a particular product but rather a thorough inspection to locate nesting sites and foraging trails,” Buczkowski said.

PMPs should prioritize a thorough inspection before jumping to treatments. By identifying problem areas such as unkempt kitchens and moist spaces in basements and bathrooms, PMPs and homeowners can work together to eliminate suitable environments for OHAs to colonize.

“Ants are far more than just a pest that people want to get rid of,” Martinez said. “They are a finely tuned machine made to survive and should be treated with that respect.”

Educating the community on the difficulties associated with infestations can help ensure cooperation with PMPs.

When tackling an OHA infestation, a combination of baits and sprays is key to effective control. Care should be taken to follow foraging trails to nesting sites and to treat trails directly when possible. If nests are located within wall voids or difficult-to-reach places, baiting may be best.

Since these ants are highly mobile and form expansive colonies with multiple nests, baiting is often the most reliable long-term solution. Use slow-acting, carbohydrate-based baits to target foraging workers and allow time for the toxicant to be shared with the colony.

Communicate with your clients that baits need time to work as the pesticide needs to be carried back to the colony and fed to the brood and queens — it may take multiple weeks to gain control.

Avoid spraying repellent insecticides near bait placements, as this can cause colony fragmentation and make the problem worse. Non-repellent sprays can be used as perimeter treatments or spot applications along trails and entry points without interfering with bait uptake. By combining these methods strategically, you can maximize control and keep your clients happy with long-lasting results.

The author is an entomology P.h.D. student at Washington State University.



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