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EXCLUSIONSOLUTION

Similarities abound between PCOs and wildlife control operators. But before jumping into wildlife control, PCOs must consider the following seven tips. **by Darlene Taylor**

A PCO is accustomed to receiving calls from homeowners or business owners regarding insects and mice or rats. But what happens when the pests are larger and have done considerably more damage? For example, are PCOs equipped to provide exclusion techniques for skunks and raccoons?

Joe Felegi, vice president of operations for Critter Control Corporation, headquartered in Traverse City, Mich., understands the similarities of Integrated Pest Management for the two groups. In fact, he states that the five core principles of IPM — monitoring devices, traps, debris removal, habitat modification and exclusion — pertain to mice or raccoons equally.

Instead of glueboards, for instance, wildlife control operators use newspaper shoved into a hole to check for an animal entering or exiting. Traps are used to catch the animal and remove it from the premises. Backyard cleanup can eradicate an animal's outdoor environment, and branches near a roof can be trimmed to eliminate an easy pathway to the house. Additionally, holes and cracks can be sealed to exclude the animals.

START-UP. Felegi, who lives in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., stresses seven areas of concern for anyone entering the wildlife control arena, either as a start-up company,



Do you know how to properly walk on a roof? You should before performing wildlife control.

or a pest management firm adding these services to an existing company.

1 Know your limitations. Decide how extensive your company's services will be. Will you offer simple exclusion work such as caulking and sealing, or major work, including roof repairs?

2 Buy the correct equipment. "Don't buy the cheap \$20 drill. Buy quality," stresses Felegi. Technicians will need equipment to stand up to the rigors of climbing on to roofs and exploring in crawlspaces.

3 Properly train employees. Hiring the correct employees helps in the learning curve process. "Most of my employees came from a construction background," says Felegi. "They know how to build houses and how they're built and that's who I want to do my repair work for me." Training also can touch on safety issues and how to walk properly on roofs.

4 Learn proper repair techniques. The house, when repairs are complete, should match its former appearance. Felegi stores shingles or roof tiles to match nearly

any existing roof, and he adds that homeowners nearly always have existing paint that can be used to match.

5 Have a price list for employees. It's important that jobs are quoted correctly. A written price list for technicians to use when estimating a job helps cut down on mistakes.

6 Have written proposals/contracts. This document is used both to inform the customer about exactly what is being done, and also as a checklist for the company to make sure all repairs are made. In the future, if the customer has additional trouble with pests and questions the work done, this contract will provide proof of the work that was completed.

7 Have written guarantees. It is important to spell out what is guaranteed, whether it is the whole house or just the repair site. In most cases, it is in the company's best interest to only guarantee the repair site. Additionally, an owner will want to decide the timeframe of the guarantee. "My standard warranty is one year,

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but that can vary depending on the job," states Felegi.

Many wildlife control operators have tapped an additional source of revenue. Using a database, all customers and their guarantees are input and reinspections can be scheduled at the warranty lapse date. "Our customers were begging us for this," says Felegi. "We can schedule a half-hour walk around, check what we did before, and look for new things."

EQUIPMENT. Wildlife control operators need access to a few more tools than a PCO, including extension and A-frame ladders and aerial lifts. Felegi recommends extension ladders up to 40 feet, and aerial lifts if the height is greater. A safety precaution exercised at his company is that any job over the height of 40 feet is a two-person operation. Additional time is factored in on aerial lift repairs. "Any job that takes 15 minutes on the ground will take a half hour on a lift," Felegi explains.

Many other basic tools would be included on a tool belt, including a hammer, drill, measuring tape, utility knife, tin snips and a saw. Safety equipment includes a hard

hat, safety glasses, steel-tip shoes, gloves, safety harnesses, ropes and repelling gear. Felegi estimates that he spends \$400 on equipment for each new technician, and the technician is thoroughly trained on each piece of equipment.

MATERIALS. If wildlife control operators are not only removing pests from a house or place of business but also performing repairs to the site, building materials will be needed. This can include caulk, sheet metal, stucco, foam, lumber, screws and nails.

Critter Control handles minor repairs to the roof, but if larger repairs are needed, Felegi has a network of roofers to recommend to the homeowner. "Build relationships with roofers," he stresses. "Then they can refer you when they're called to do a repair and there's an animal involved."

CONSTRUCTION. Felegi ensures his technicians know the differences between dormers and ridges, and drip edges and step flashing. He trains them on safety techniques, to protect them and the homeowners. For example, Spanish tile, prevalent on houses in the Southern United

States, can be easily cracked when walked upon. Technicians are trained to repair any damage they may have caused.

Much like a PCO's customer, the homeowner wants results. Ultimately, wildlife control operators must remove the pest before any repairs are attempted. "The homeowner wants it sealed right away," says Felegi, "but the wildlife control operator must make the homeowner understand that the animal cannot be sealed inside."

SIMILARITIES. Both PCOs and wildlife control operators are removing pests, while also helping to educate customers about debris removal and habitat modification. Additional considerations for wildlife control operators include a height element, dealing with larger animals that can bite and scratch, and construction repairs following successful trapping of the pest. "I cannot stress safety enough. What we do is dangerous work and that's why I think a lot of people don't get into it," says Felegi. 🐾

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