

PEST MANAGEMENT IN MUSEUMS AND HISTORIC HOUSES

WHAT IS PEST MANAGEMENT [IPM] ?

All too often pest control in museums and houses is a reaction to the discovery of insect activity and damage. The aim of IPM is to provide practical, safe and cost-effective methods to prevent collections, furnishings and buildings from being damaged by pests. The main IPM principles used in museums are; monitoring for pests, targeting treatment only where it is needed and modifying the environment to discourage pest attack.

WHY USE IPM IN A MUSEUM OR HOUSE?

Care of collections and historic buildings involves many different disciplines including conservation and management of collections and buildings. The major causes of deterioration are the environmental effects of temperature and humidity together with agents of decay such as insects and moulds. All of these factors are inter-related and the IPM approach is to look at the whole picture rather than to react to each crisis. The expertise in collections care in museums and houses can be used to develop an IPM programme tailored to the specific needs of a collection or historic house.

DEVELOPING AN IPM STRATEGY

IPM must be relevant to the needs of the building or collection. It should use as much local information and expertise as possible. It should also be practical and achievable as it is all too easy to devise a grandiose IPM scheme which turns out to be unworkable. It should be a process of evolution rather than revolution and encourage participation by all staff.

In order to develop an IPM strategy it is important to understand and recognise some of the key components of successful pest control. These are:

- ! **Avoid pests** - by keeping pests out
- ! **Prevent pests** - by denying them safe haven
- ! **Recognise pests** - the main species and the damage they cause
- ! **Assess the problem** - by inspection and trapping

Once the problem has been evaluated then the options for control must be evaluated. There are many factors involved in the decision on what will be the most appropriate treatment to use. Problems in buildings must be targeted, for example, by cleaning and use of residual insecticides in specific areas. The treatment used against an infestation in an object will depend upon the type and fragility of the object, the situation it is in, the environment where it is kept and the available budget. Options include; low temperature, high temperature, carbon dioxide fumigation and nitrogen anoxia. Any decision involving historic material should be approved by a trained conservator.

Benefits

- ! A well planned and executed IPM programme will prevent crisis and will prevent problems recurring.
- ! Modern IPM methods are much safer for objects, staff and the environment than routine use of toxicants.
- ! In times of reduced budgets, an IPM programme will make much more effective use of limited human and cash resources.

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Key references and further reading

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