



Grahame Turner from Mitie

Reflections on external rodent monitoring

With proactive use of rodenticide externally now prohibited, how can you monitor for external rodent infestation? When the CRRU stewardship requirements were first mooted, Mitie Pest Control considered the options and decided what they termed 'Latent Boxes' was the way forward. Grahame Turner, Mitie's technical and training manager – and also a **Pest** Technical Advisory Board member – reports.

It was considered that replacing the toxic bait with cereal-based non-toxic monitoring blocks would have a negative impact, as these just provide a food source to which passing rodents will be attracted, so increasing the likelihood of them setting up home in the area. We felt this might not only lead to greater levels of infestation in our customer's premises, but the increased time spent on site whilst they fed might also distort the apparent risk.

An alternative would be the new NARA allergen free blocks, which don't provide any nutrition and so would be unlikely to actually encourage rodents to seek out local harbourage. But using these extensively would be an expensive option. Plus, some rodent populations have local food preferences, making the use of NARA ineffective and, perhaps, even giving a false sense of security.

It is known that break-back traps left in external boxes catch non-targets such as toads, grass snakes, garden birds and stoats. So installing traps widely as monitoring agents was also rejected as an option.

Inspiration came with the idea of leaving the boxes empty!

Empty boxes:

- **Provide a monitoring station in the form of a shelter where rodents might let us know of their presence.** Since Mitie implemented this policy two years ago, latent boxes have been found with droppings in, nut shells, hoarded food etc. So it appears rodents are comfortable using them and leaving signs of their activity there without any additional food supply added;
- **Should help reduce the impact of neophobia.** If rats do infest the area, the boxes are already in position ready for bait or traps to be applied.

Another judgement was that technicians would adjust to using their professional skills to detect infestation rather than rely on bait block checking – this is promoted in ongoing technician training. So enhanced monitoring is achieved for the customer combined with making the job more interesting for the technician – a 'win win' situation!

Latent box idea

The term 'Latent Box' was coined to help promote the concept to customers. So that auditors did not think the technicians had just been lazy leaving the boxes empty, special cards were placed in the boxes to inform any auditors who opened the boxes.

A key element of the success of the latent boxes is that



All the Mitie 'latent boxes' contain an auditor information card



A welcome bonus for wildlife. Robins' nests have been found on several occasions

monitoring blocks do not necessarily give any more evidence of true activity than latent boxes combined with keen observation by vigilant technicians. Not all boxes are latent - whilst traps are broadly not deemed appropriate for permanent installation, siting them in high risk parts of sensitive sites can still sometimes be justified, either short term or long term.

A welcome bonus for wildlife is that robins have also been finding the latent boxes desirable – several have been found with nests in earlier this year!



Evidence of rodent activity found in a 'latent box'

Cleankill agree robins like bait boxes

It's not just Mitie technicians who have found robins' nests in rodent bait stations – obviously a favourite spot for robins.

Daniel Parsons, team leader at Cleankill Environmental Services, was surprised by his find during a routine service visit to an industrial site near to Heathrow airport. Dan explains: "During a regular service visit a robin was pottering around me. When I opened the metal bait station it was full with the robin's nest and eggs. The trap inside had been set off by nesting materials touching it. It's the first time I've come across anything quite like this in a bait station."

Maybe there's a new sales opportunity for bait box manufacturers!



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