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PMP Pest Management PROFESSIONAL

CONQUERING CALLBACKS

2018 ANT MANAGEMENT SUPPLEMENT

INSIDE:

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CSI offers ant control innovations you can apply

BY **DR. JANIS REED, BCE** | Technical Services Manager,
Product Development Team, Control Solutions Inc.



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Like so many pests we face, ant management provides us with many challenges. No two ant jobs are exactly the same. There are many things that make ant control difficult, but thanks to the number of different species we encounter, proper identification tops the list. *Truman's Scientific Guide to Pest Management Operations* highlights nearly two dozen ant species that are considered important to pest management professionals (PMPs), and this number is not near the number the average PMP will see in his or her career.

Making matters even more difficult, each year we seem to get a “new” or invasive ant introduction, bringing with them new challenges and tough management circumstances. Just in the past few years, we have seen tawny crazy ants (*Nylanderia fulva*) and Asian needle ants (*Brachyponera chinensis*). Most recently, in south Florida, large numbers of the little yellow ant (*Plagiolepis alluaudi*) have been reported.

The federal government, including the U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) work to prevent the introduction of invasive species and stop the spread of the organisms if it gains entry. However, invasive species are not just a U.S. problem; they are a major issue globally. Invasive ants, as well as other organisms, are of major environmental concern. They have, in some cases, immeasurable impacts on wildlife, ecosystems and human commerce.

Unfortunately, no place is immune — invasive species have threatened ecological balance in all types of environments including islands, fresh water bodies, forests, pastures and grasslands, and even suburban neighborhoods. In many of these cases, PMPs are called upon to solve problems with new, unknown species with little experience or scientific know-how to back them up.

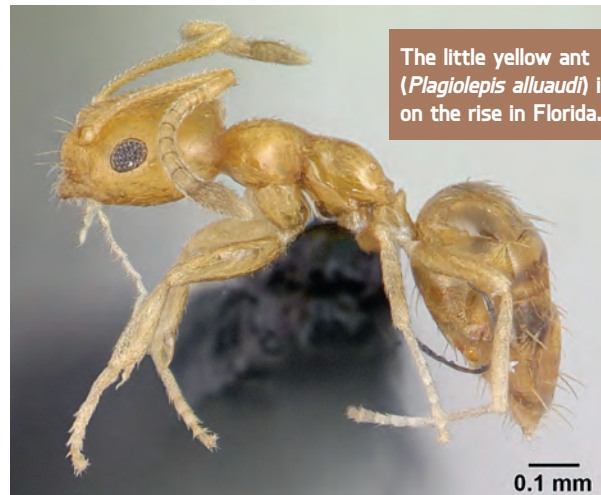
WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Luckily, no one has to face these issues in a vacuum. If you have ever tried to manage red imported fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*), odorous house ants (*Tapinoma*

sessile), or Argentine ants (*Linepithema humile*), just to name a few, you've faced an invasive ant before! By relying on the knowledge, skills and abilities gained in these challenges, PMPs can face and overcome any ant trial they tackle. Additionally, our industry continues to develop and introduce highly effective products and treatment strategies aimed at managing ant infestations.

At Control Solutions Inc. (CSI), we strive daily to bring our industry innovative and differentiated products to help PMPs in the fight against pests, including ants. We develop products for PMPs that aid in management of both the familiar and the new pest species. Our focus is to provide PMPs with an ever-growing toolbox to employ during their daily battles in all pest situations, especially ant infestations.

We are proud to be a part of, and to support, this industry. We look forward to continuing our partnership with PMPs to confront any challenge on the horizon, regardless of insect species or origin. Our passion is support, and providing these tools every day. Our passion is providing PMPs with effective, innovative and economical pest control solutions.



The little yellow ant (*Plagiolepis alluaudi*) is on the rise in Florida.

Strategic planning leads to **ant success**

By **Diane Sofranec** | *PMP* Managing Editor



A thorough inspection revealed ants behind an electrical outlet. Inspection and treatment are key.

Although more than 12,000 species of ants roam the earth, the National Pest Management Association reports pest management professionals (PMPs) battle carpenter ants most often.

Pest Management Professional's (PMP's) exclusive 2018 Ant Management Survey shows this ant species generates the most jobs *and* the most callbacks. Readers responding to previous *PMP* Ant Management Surveys have had the same response.

KNOW THE SPECIES

Because so many ant species exist, proper identification is the first step toward successful management. It was the top tip offered by survey respondents.

"You must identify species correctly," says Stacey White, owner of Vintage Pest Management in Peoria, Ariz. "This is especially important because this is the deciding factor on which product(s) you're going to use and where to place them."

Each species exhibits its own unique behavior, and proper identification helps PMPs develop solid plans of action.

"Be aware of what species of ant you are dealing with," says Andrew Dzieman, manager of Borite in Sherman Oaks, Calif. "Their behaviors will guide you on how to treat, and where to find them."



Stacey White

CUT DOWN ON CALLBACKS

The majority of the PMPs who answered our 2018 Ant Management Survey report callbacks occur less than 5 percent of the time. To help eliminate callbacks, they report that choosing the appropriate product for the ant species is a must.

"Research is required before applying products: Labels should always be read, and products should be researched before use," advises Dzieman. "Use multiple application

techniques and integrated pest management (IPM). The combination is the key."

Gustavo Hernandez, CEO and termite and pest control specialist for H2 Environmental Pest Management in Astoria, N.Y., says he learned early on in his pest control career the importance of thorough inspections.

Back then, he was called out to a home, he says, where a PMP who had been there two weeks before failed to find and manage ants.

"When I arrived, my inspection found ants nesting in an electrical outlet in the kitchen," Hernandez explains. "I treated the outlet and after a week, the client did not see even one ant."

His perseverance continues to pay off. Service calls for ants are up. Currently, ant management revenue is about 25 percent of total revenue; a couple of years ago, it was 5 percent to 10 percent.

The ant management services he provides include one follow-up visit three weeks after the initial service. "We get to see the results, and our clients remember how good we are," he says.

Vintage Pest Management's White advises against rushing through inspections.

"Ant inspections can be a game of chess," she says. "You have to carefully study your opponent — the ants — follow their behavior, and then use it against them."

Following up will help ensure customer satisfaction. But that's what PMPs *should* do. What should they not do? Promise customers they will never see an ant.

"No sooner do the words leave your lips and BOOM, ants are back, full force," White says. "The customer will be calling you back and you'll have to fumble through an explanation. The key is *management*." PMP

You can reach **SOFRANEC** at dsfranec@northcoastmedia.net or 216-706-3793.



Gustavo Hernandez



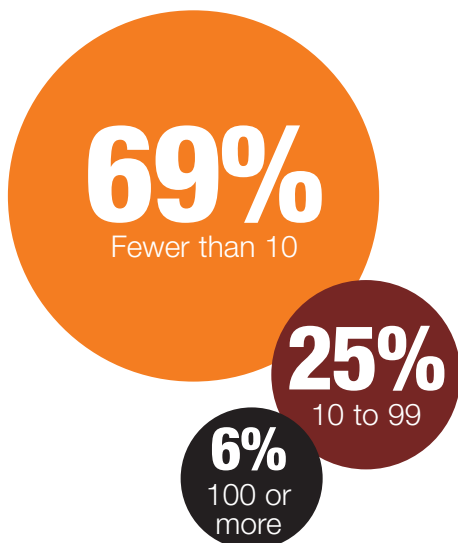
Andrew Dzieman



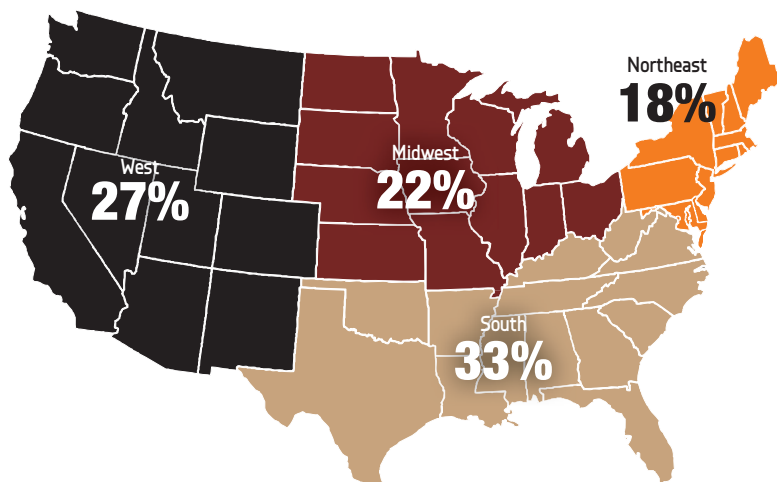
Ant Management Survey

SOURCE: PMP ONLINE SURVEY CONDUCTED MARCH-APRIL 2018

NUMBER OF TECHNICIANS



AREA OF OPERATIONS



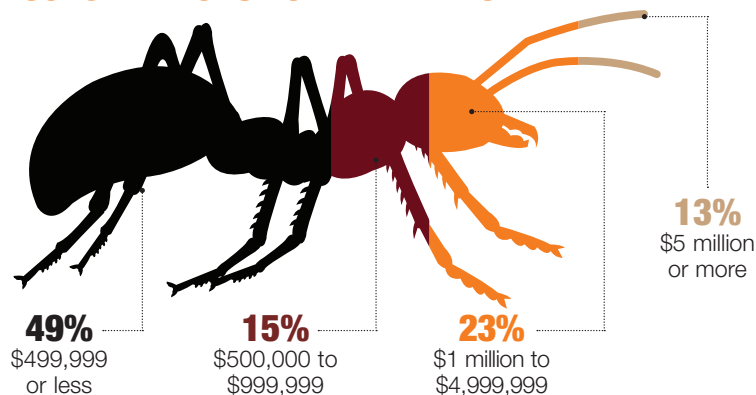
WEST: AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY

MIDWEST: OH, IN, IL, MI, WI, MN, MO, IA, ND, SD, NE, KS

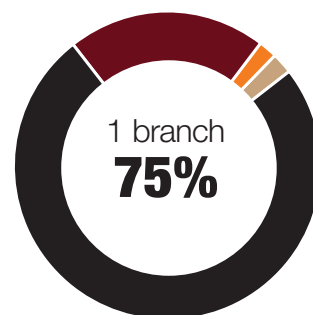
SOUTH: AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV

NORTHEAST: CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, NJ, NH, NY, PA, RI, VT, D.C.

PROJECTED 2018 TOTAL REVENUE



NUMBER OF BRANCHES

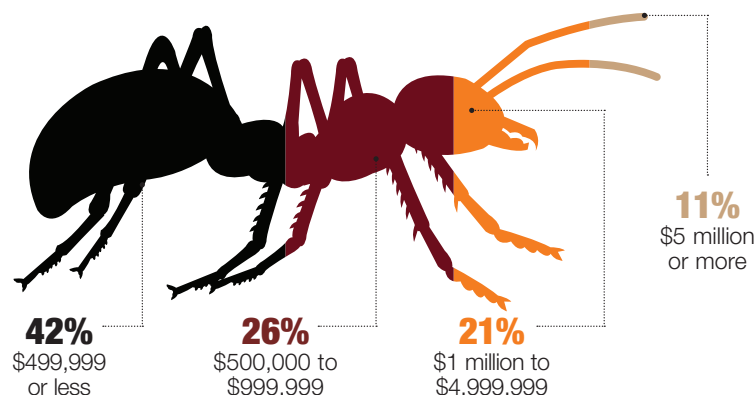


2 to 19 branches 21%

20 to 99 branches 2%

100 or more branches 2%

PROJECTED 2018 ANT MANAGEMENT REVENUE



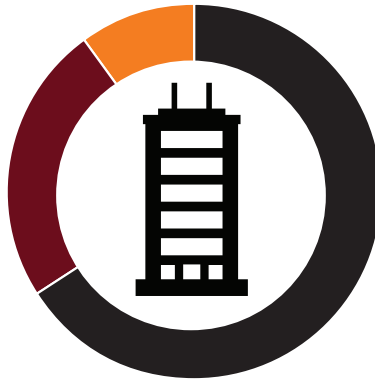
55% project
ant callback rates
will improve in 2018

ANT MANAGEMENT REVENUE BY STRUCTURE TYPE



RESIDENTIAL

25% or less of ant mgmt. revenue **18%**
 26% to 50% of ant mgmt. revenue **16%**
 51% or more of ant mgmt. revenue **66%**



COMMERCIAL

25% or less of ant mgmt. revenue **66%**
 26% to 50% of ant mgmt. revenue **24%**
 51% or more of ant mgmt. revenue **10%**



GOVERNMENT/ MUNICIPAL

25% or less of ant mgmt. revenue **91%**
 26% to 50% of ant mgmt. revenue **7%**
 51% or more of ant mgmt. revenue **2%**

Projected 2018 Ant Management Revenue from Liquid Treatments



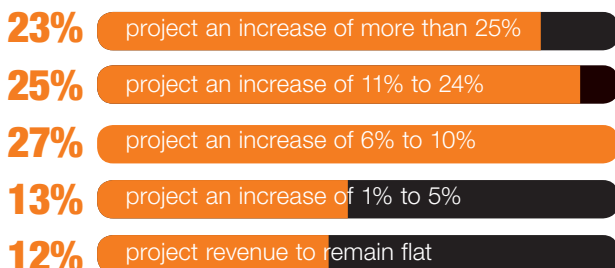
Projected 2018 Average Price of Initial Ant Inspection and Treatment

19% charge an average of \$99 or less
1% charges an average of \$500 to \$999



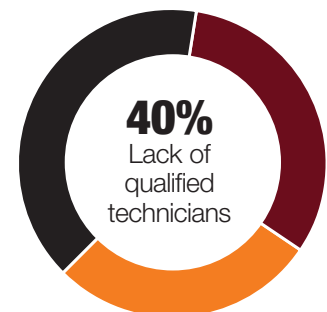
Ant Management Revenue

2018 Projections vs. 2017 Actuals



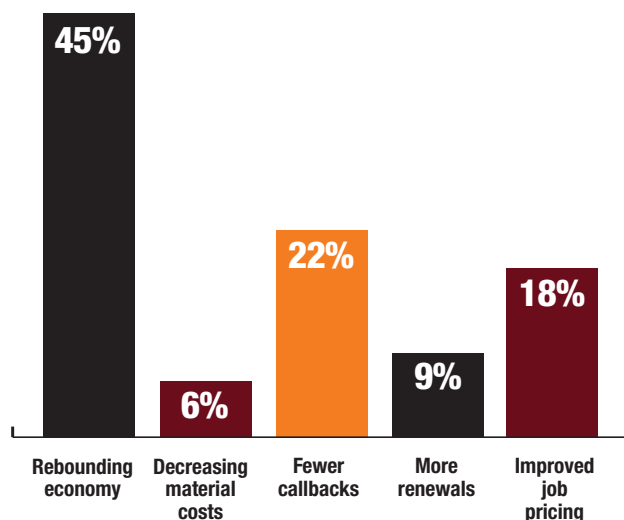
Top Obstacles to Growing Ant Management Revenue

32% Fierce pricing competition
28% Sluggish economy

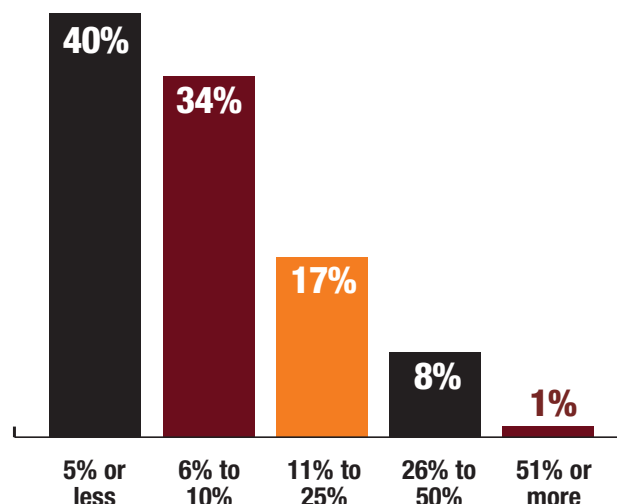




TOP OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWING ANT MANAGEMENT REVENUE



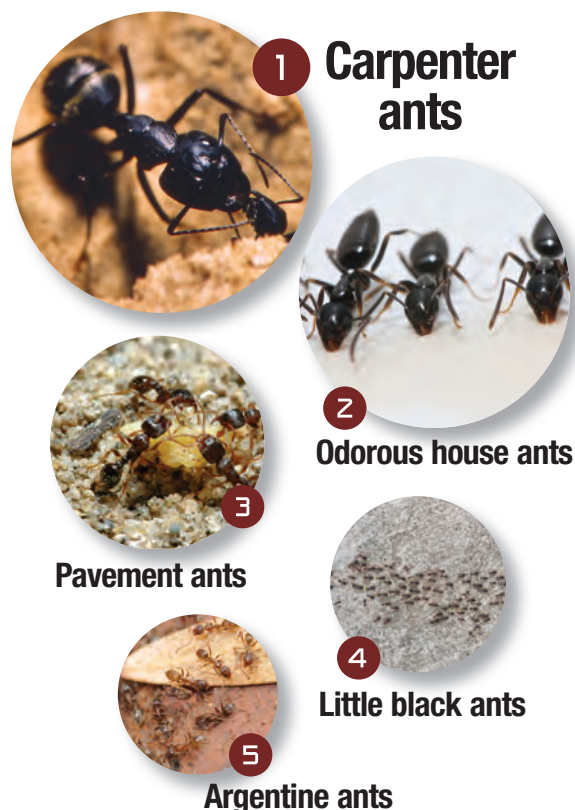
CALLBACK PERCENTAGE ON NEW ANT TREATMENTS IN 2017



TOP 5 PEST ANTS BY NUMBER OF JOBS GENERATED



TOP 5 PEST ANTS BY NUMBER OF CALLBACKS GENERATED



5 ways to conquer ant callbacks

Ant management can be challenging; focus on these five steps to improve success.

By Diane Sofranec | PMP Managing Editor

Ant control can be a challenge for anyone, even for experienced pest management professionals (PMPs). Success depends on identifying the correct species, finding the nest, determining the ideal treatment and eliminating the colony.

No matter how long you've been a PMP, chances are you've experienced a callback (or two) on an ant management job. You can develop a strategy, though, that will help reduce the number of callbacks, ensure customer satisfaction and even boost revenue.

1 COMMUNICATION

"There are many skills that a modern pest control professional must use with fidelity to ensure a positive customer experience," says Cameron Brennan, owner of Brennan Pest Control in Pensacola, Fla. "Key among them is communication, and it is often overlooked and underemployed."

Talk to your customers, and be realistic about expectations, he recommends. It's especially important when the source of the problem is in an inaccessible area, like a neighbor's yard. If getting the neighbors involved isn't possible, communication becomes critical.

"Explain the situation, offer possible solutions, and lay out a plan your customer can follow," he says. "They'll appreciate your candor, and you'll spend a lot less time on the back end, backpedaling."



Cameron Brennan



Brennan, an industry veteran who opened his pest management business in February, speaks from experience. Once, a customer complained about all the dead ants in view. Now, he educates customers so they know what to expect after treatment, too.

"We are the professionals, and we should know how long our treatments will remain effective," Brennan says.

Take the customer on a tour of the structure and demonstrate why it's important to remove conducive conditions, he says. Explain how simple steps like cutting the grass, keeping vegetation away from buildings, storing dry pet food in sealed containers, cleaning grease off the top and sides of stoves, and vacuuming behind and under refrigerators will help keep ants away. Doing so will allow customers to take ownership of their situations for a lasting, positive outcome.

Honesty is the best policy, says Roger "Derby" Schafer, owner of A Access Denied Pest Control in Las Vegas, Nev. "Being honest in all situations is the best practice," he says. "Earning a client's trust one service at a time, and then maintaining that trust, is necessary for future revenue and business growth."

2 COOPERATION

For Schafer, ant management services during peak season account for about 20 percent of his company's revenue. If heavy rains occur in the off-season, his company can generate up to 22 percent more ant service calls. Schafer attributes the increases to customers who do not have some type of maintenance program: "When the ants arrive, it can be large infestations that will generate one to two more treatments, especially if they didn't prep correctly."

Even customers with maintenance plans need to cooperate with his technicians to help manage pests. Preparation is key, he says, as 98 percent of



Derby Schafer



the time, the customers who have issues are the ones who refused to comply with technicians' requests to improve conducive conditions.

"A few clients think because we provide pest control, they don't need to do anything. They hired us and think it is totally up to the pest control company to cure their ant issues," Schafer says. "But we all know success is a 50/50 proposition."

Convincing customers that ant management will be more successful with their cooperation can be a challenge.

"Most customers understand that pest control is a process, not an event, but there are always a few who want an immediate fix," says Jana Claus, office manager for Natura Pest Control in Vancouver, Wash.

3 EDUCATION

Claus says her team explains their ant management process to customers, including how results won't be immediate. Although technicians may be tempted to promise that treatment will work right away, customers will likely see an increase in activity for a short time before the ant population decreases, and then ceases altogether.

"It can be hard to give customers a realistic expectation when they want a magic wand," Claus says. "It's better to be honest from the very beginning rather than to make a promise based on false hopes."

Many times, impatient customers may attempt to solve the pest problem themselves, which makes the PMP's job even more challenging. Claus says it's important to clearly explain to a customer who isn't patient that using any other products during treatment is going to slow down the process.

"We have seen people desperately use window cleaners, bleach and disinfectants to kill the ants they see," she says. "When customers have an understanding of how nonrepellent products work, they are less likely to go back to those unhelpful habits."

Explaining the behaviors of ant queens, describing colonies, and outlining what the products used will actually do also is helpful.



Jana Claus

4 DEDICATION

Dedicating the right amount of time for the service, and scheduling follow-up service when needed, is key for Jeff Weidhaas, ACE, technical training and safety manager, Bruce Terminix Co., Greensboro, N.C.

"Setting a follow-up may seem counterintuitive to a PMP, because most of us don't make a penny providing a re-service. But we don't make a penny doing the five angry service calls that come in from a 'ready to cancel' customer because we didn't solve the problem, either," Weidhaas says. "I'll invest one follow-up to save four additional service calls any month."

Weidhaas says his company's ant services have continued to steadily increase over the past several years. Now, ants account for more than 75 percent of Bruce Terminix's pest control revenue, and is the primary reason its customers get — and more importantly, keep — pest control.

"Our employees who control ants need to deliver world-class service," Weidhaas says. "Our customers are counting on us."

Reducing callbacks is almost always a simple matter of time investment, says Dan Baldwin, BCE, CCFS, CP-FS, senior food safety scientist, Taco Bell Corporate, Irvine, Calif.

"The callback is a triple-loser," Baldwin explains. "One, you're messing up your schedule and going back for free; two, you're not doing a paid service while you're doing the free service; and three, the client isn't happy."

Sure, PMPs experience an atypical situation every once in a while. You learn from it and then move on, he says. But you can avoid the majority of callbacks with a small investment of time and attention.

"Focused time is the currency of pest prevention — and properly invested, there's a substantial return on investment," Baldwin says. "Investing an extra 10 to 15 minutes the first time can help retain an hour or two of revenue-generating time, and spare the office staff a lot of headaches."



Jeff Weidhaas



Dan Baldwin

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5 PRODUCT SELECTION

Product selection, based on effectiveness, is more important than product price, says Greg See, operations manager for Pointe Pest Control in Post Falls, Idaho. He says the company worked diligently with manufacturer reps and field technicians to find the right combination of products and treatment techniques. The effort paid off; the company's overall callback rate dropped from 6.9 percent in 2016 to 4.4 percent in 2017.

See admits he was nervous about purchasing products that were more expensive.

"I would buy everyone one bottle, write their name on it, and say, 'This is all you get. Make it last. Choose wisely when you need to use it,'" he says. "Over time, as I began to trust our technicians more, I loosened my grip and allowed them more access to 'better' products."



Greg See

The company has since further honed its treatment techniques, product selection, and customer education information. At first, he says, it was a bit of a guessing game to get the exact net results he wanted, and to see whether the effort was worth it. But over time, the change became measurable.

When comparing 2017 to 2016, the company's callbacks are down across the board, on all routes. And its overall cost of chemicals, as a percentage of company revenue, went down instead of up. See attributes this to being able to perform more paid services per day, and fewer callbacks per day or week.

"The best part is that our team morale is up," he says. "The technicians are glad to be doing more paid stops, and fewer callbacks."

When shopping for an ant control product, See says he looks for results and effectiveness. He then finds the best price for that product through his distributors, manufacturer rebate programs, and bulk purchasing options. **PMP**

You can reach **SOFRANEC** at dsofranec@northcoastmedia.net or 216-706-3793.

LOCATE NESTS TO HELP CURB CALLBACKS



Carpenter ants



Little black ants

Carpenter ants (*Camponotus* spp.): Look for nests outdoors where wood, like tree stumps and plants, is damp or moldy, and indoors where wet and damaged wood allow them to enter.

Odorous house ants (*Tapinoma sessile*): Nests likely will be near homes outdoors in soil and under mulch, logs and rocks, or in cracks. They may also be found in the walls and floors of a structure.

Pavement ants (*Tetramorium caespitum*): Nests typically are found outdoors in the soil under and next to cement slabs, sidewalks, patios and driveways. But they can also be indoors under foundations and inside hollow walls.

Little black ants (*Monomorium minimum*): Search for nests outdoors under rocks, bricks and lumber. Search indoors behind facades and in woodwork, decaying wood and wall voids.

Argentine ants (*Linepithema humile*): Nests usually are shallow and found outdoors under plants, stones and boards, or along sidewalks.

SOURCE: NATIONAL PEST MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION



Inspection is a critical first step in the ant management process. Take your time and be thorough.

“Keep an open line of communication with customers who have ant issues.”

— Richard Sims, pest control division manager, Curry's Termite, Pest & Animal Control, Little Rock, Ark.



“Ask your customer questions. Don't treat every job as if it's the same. Take your time and come up with a game plan. Don't rush into a treatment.”

— Don Aaron, owner, Pest Free, Wichita, Kan.

“Eliminate conducive conditions. Be thorough and don't overlook the obvious. Don't promise what you can't deliver, as far as time needed to control the ant infestation.”

— Jim Merrill, entomologist, F&W Pest Control, Wrentham, Mass.

“Don't treat before conducting an inspection. A thorough exterior inspection could reveal where the ants are getting in, thus reducing the amount of product needed to solve the problem.”

— Randy Darrah, ACE, pest department manager, Slug-A-Bug, Melbourne, Fla.



“Listen to your clients when explaining where ants were sighted, but don't assume that the ants were sighted at their entry points. Correctly identify the ant species involved, then inspect for entry points in the interior and on the exterior. Look for food, trails and harborage. Explain to the client the expectations and timeframe involved in control.”

— Earl MacLean, technician, Baxter Pest Professionals, Muncie, Ind.

“Maintain an open line of communication with your employees. Conduct ride alongs and quality control inspections. Do not micromanage, but talk to your technicians and ask them about their product choices. Take continuing education classes.”

— Chris Snyder, president, Quest Termite & Pest, Bethlehem, Pa.

Pros' tips for successful ant management

“Make sure enough material is being used, per label instructions. Also, don't assume ants in the kitchen are not coming from the basement or attic.”

— Jeremy Roesel, operations manager, Rentokil North America, Reading, Pa.

“Show do-it-yourselfers that we can control the ants. Sell an ongoing program; you are protecting their properties.”

— Jerry Zapf, owner, Sure Thing Pest Control, Cincinnati, Ohio



“Find the source of the ants. Don't allow customers to use their own chemicals over yours. Don't go back for retreats until it's been two weeks since your last treatment.”

— Sheri Monroe, president, Grand Rapids Pest Control, Grand Rapids, Mich.

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