

A SNAPSHOT OF THE FUTURE

BY DR. GERALD WEGNER

PROLOGUE

Imagine yourself being transported a decade into the future. You are the laptop computer, the traveling companion, of a pest management company's technical director for a day. You are privy to his thoughts as he works through a tight schedule. Are you ready to travel ahead? Engage! 1998...99...

2000...2001... '02... '03... '04... '05... '06... 2007.

ISAAC 9000 DAYRUNNER

File: Technical Director's Log

Printed transcript of dictation.

Entry Date: 01/June/2007

0800 MEETING WITH PCTRONICS SALES REPRESENTATIVE, DAVE — Dave wants us to lease their improved PestScan system. The helmet is fitted with superimposable, color-

coded readouts of moisture, temperature and methane gradients. The wearer can "see" insect colonies hidden inside structural voids. The built-in mini-cam records what the user sees on laser disk for instant playback. The helmet and disk are compatible with PCTronics' VirtualTech virtual reality system for training field personnel. They want us to try their two new VirtualTech situations, titled *Approaches to Drywood Termite Infestations* and *Scenarios for Managing Stored Grain Pests*.

Also, PCTronics is loaning us the RemoFrac remote control vehicle with light source, mini-cam, moisture probe and monitor. We can try it out to inspect inaccessible crawlspaces and other confined or hazardous situations.

[Confidential Comments: Jim says we can't budget both the PestScan and the RemoFrac, so I'll have to make a choice—for now.]



This technician wears a PestScan (moisture, methane and thermal optical-detection system) helmet.

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100 OBSERVE AND ASSIST AT ACCT.

#03762 — I have discovered why we are using so much material on the job. Luke, the on-site technician, deliberately disconnected the TermiSys metering equipment. He is being pulled off the job for retraining. [Confidential Comments: When I asked old Luke why he was not using the instruments, he replied, "I heard a voice in my head say, 'Luke, use the force!'" I think that was his idea of a joke—something to do with an old sci-fi movie he cherishes.]

200 LUNCH MEETING WITH PROFLEET REPRESENTATIVE, LISA

— Lisa recommends we switch our vehicles from methane and propane-fueled internal combustion engines to hydrogen/carbide fuel-cell electric motors. ProFleet is willing to rotate two new vehicles a year with a minimal lease hike.

Lisa says ProFleet's latest ComSat satellite communications system should give us an improved phone link between our mobile and stationary units. In addition, they are updating map grids of this area for the ComSat vehicle guidance and tracking function.

[Confidential Comments: Lisa says ProFleet is meeting strong resistance to going commercial with AeroDyne's new Hovervan from the Federal Aviation Administration and various state and municipal governments. The authorities claim that numerous Hovervans, operating within the 30- to 200-meter altitude range, pose considerable risk to buildings and ground traffic. Authorities also fear that accidents due to mid-air collisions and operational failures may result in contamination and endangerment of humans and the environment, depending on the cargo or contents of the Hovervans involved.]

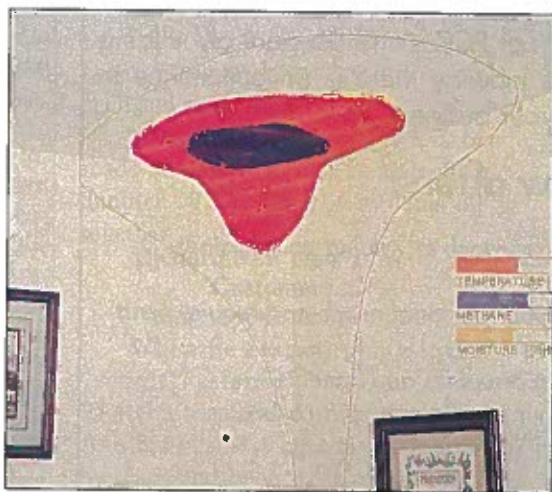
1330 ASSIST WITH ACCT. #03770—

Picked up and delivered a Magnasonic module replacement for the Sonicator masonry drill on-site.

[Confidential Comments: These units don't last like they are supposed to. Check with the manufacturer's rep to see if we can get a free replacement module under warranty.]

1430 CHECK E-MAIL AND MESSAGES—

1. Requisition materials on list when you return.
2. Call Frank at Rentomologist Consultants.
3. Call Sally with National Rent-A-Tech.
4. Ed at VertebrEx is sending you the catalog you requested.
5. Cheryl with EntoPlex says the insect holograms are ready to pick up.
6. Call Mrs. Stuben (Acct. #03745)



Structural moisture and insect infestations signatures, as seen through the PestScan visor.

regarding mystery bugs.

[Confidential Comments: Frank is probably calling to gloat about his invitation to train with NASA for a one-month appointment to the Aquilla space station. Apparently, it has a small, but persistent German cockroach infestation. Pests in space. Another first!

Be sure to arrive early tomorrow to prepare the holographic specimens for the pest ID and biology training session at 0800.]

1500 MEETING OF THE PEST MANAGEMENT PRACTITIONERS AND REGULATORS FORUM (SEE DIGITIZED HANDOUTS AND PMPRF FILE)—

Topics included:

- Irresponsible use of CO₂ in and around carbonic acid-sensitive equipment and poorly ventilated areas of structures.
- All businesses using masonry penetration devices and excavating equipment must pre-scan target construction and foundation areas using a LineTracker or similar device for detecting buried/hidden pipes, conduits and other lines.
- The National Wildlife Refuge Association, Protectors of the Wilderness and the Keep it Green

Club have all agreed to allocate a percentage of their membership dues, as well as earmarked contributions, to augment Superfund in the clean-up of hazardous waste sites. Furthermore, these and other organizations have reached a landmark consensus that it does little good to litigate and fine chemical manufacturers and pest management companies that are insolvent or in decline and in trouble with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In such cases, financial assistance will be

offered to remedy those situations, provided the businesses in question can demonstrate three criteria, including that the violations are unintentional, the need for assistance is great and that steps are being taken to ensure compliance with federal environmental safety standards.

[Confidential Comments: Hallelujah! It's about time the eco-

*continued on page 40
(see next page for related story)*

THE FUTURE OF PEST CONTROL

BY HEATHER GOOCH

Assistant Editor

Glenn Rollins, vice president, corporate development for Orkin Pest Control, Atlanta, Ga., addressed the topic of the industry's future at the National Pest Control Association's 1997 Academy in Scottsdale, Ariz. Rollins, who has been in

the industry since his teens, says it's ironic that many of the so-called trends of the future are what he has been learning from pest control operators (PCOs) for several years.

"The first challenge is safety concerns that exist in the marketplace," he states. "When I started in '79, there was a cer-

tain number of customers that had some satisfaction if you treated their home with malathion in warm weather! They really didn't have the phobia they have nowadays, and I think we've all heard that and known that for a while."

According to a study done by the University of Kentucky, Rollins notes, 66 percent of Americans polled believe that pesticides cause cancer. For both their home and work environments, 77 percent are concerned about pesticides. Eighty-five percent want pesticides with no odor, and 62 percent prefer only outdoor treatments. A very telling statistic states that 83 percent of those polled would pay extra for a PCO to use less pesticides in the account. Seventy-five percent of that group would pay between 10 and 25 percent more for the same results.

"I think that's significant," he intones. "I don't think that was true when many of us started in the business."

"Americans aren't just afraid of pesticides, they're afraid of us," he continues.

Rollins quotes a recent Gallup survey, where 65 percent of Americans polled confessed to having a pest problem, but only about 10 percent of that group actually called a pest control professional.

"I think there's a tremendous amount of opportunity for PCOs to narrow that gap," he states. Of those surveyed, 54 percent believe the pesticides used by PCOs are harmful, and 64 percent said they'd wait until a problem was "severe" before calling a PCO. The overriding reasons included the belief that pesticides may jeopardize the safety of the homeowners' children or pets, and the belief that the pesticides PCOs use in treatments were "too strong."

"Why is this important? Well, I believe that what we do is safe, providing a pest-free environment in a responsible way," Rollins notes. "There are a lot of misconceptions out there, though. We need to take responsibility for narrowing those gaps. I think our market could be a lot bigger than it is right now."

Focus on Loyalties

Another challenge is how PCOs today view their customers and employees.

"Historically, we have taken a mass-market approach," Rollins explains. "The

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Circle # 118

from page 38

customer was this third-party entity, not an individual. Even those of us who really customize, I think we have to say that this may be the case. Also, we may take a similar approach to employees. We should focus, perhaps, a little less on the sales area and think more about retention.

"In my opinion, we have been students of sales. We really understand sales, and as an industry, we focus a lot more on sales than on retaining customers. Even if you figure that a customer is very valuable to you and make every effort to keep a customer, have we really been students of customer retention?"

It's cheaper to save one than to get a new one, Rollins reiterates. In fact, according to research conducted by Orkin, even if it costs just as much to save the established customer as it does to scout for new ones, the one you save is a lot more valuable. Rollins quoted Orkin's research that shows that if a customer rates a PCO's service "4" out of a possible "5," he or she is six times more likely to cancel service than someone who gave a "5" out of "5."

"What that means to me is there's a lot at stake at having extremely satisfied customers," he says.

There's a kind of "consumer divide" going on in the marketplace, Rollins surmises. Companies such as Federal Express and Walmart have raised the bar on customer service, to the point where people have higher expectations from service providers. On the other hand, customers are willing to pay a high premium for something that's very personal or customized, something of true value.

"It's definitely worth our while to provide a very customized, high-value service—providing just a very average service is probably not going to be very good to you in the future," he warns.

Also, Rollins says he believes consumers will continue to "buy local," but because life is becoming more complicated, people are less likely to spend the time shopping around.

"Where they might have called five companies in the past, they now may only call one or two," he explains, adding that is not necessarily bad news to PCOs, but instead just something of which they should be aware.

"It may be heresy to some PCOs, but some customers are better than others,"

Rollins admits. "We should provide good service to all of them, but there are some customers who, when given the same level of service, are more loyal than others."

It's important for PCOs to recognize this concept and direct marketing efforts accordingly, he says. Rollins compared marketing to fishing. If you want to fish for bass, for example, you use a certain location, a certain lure, a certain technique. Likewise, PCOs should tailor their offerings to the types of customers they want to attract—and keep.

"We all need to take a mental note as to the lifetime value of a customer. Not because you can put a price on it, but so you realize the impact it can have on your business," Rollins states. Think about it, he urges. If you bought all your groceries in your lifetime from one grocery store, that grocer would make hundreds of thousands of dollars. Similarly, if you bought pizza all those years from one pizza parlor, there's quite a bit of revenue for that business.

With that mindset, think of how much revenue your loyal customers are bringing in over the long-term to your pest control company, he explains, adding, "How would this change the decisions that you make? How would you apply your efforts and resources?"

Employees Benefit

Competent, well-trained employees, of course, are only going to become more important in the future, as consumer expectations of services increase.

"In the past, there's been kind of a mass-market approach to hiring," Rollins notes. "There was an attitude that the people needed the company more than the company needed the people. I think that's shifting pretty rapidly. There's more of a sense that people can contribute a lot."

"The companies that succeed in the future are those who do the best job selecting good employees," he proclaims. "After all, they are really our product."

In summary, Rollins stresses the loyalty of customers and employees as the foundation of success in the future. He predicts there will be some consolidation in the future, more so on the commercial side, but that owner-operators

groups learned that it is unethical to kick people when they're down.]

1700 QUALITY ASSURANCE VISIT TO ACCT. #03745

— Mrs. Stuben says she sees "tiny flying bugs" that also jump and burrow into her skin. She showed me a variety of welts, rashes and scabby patches on her arms, neck and legs. I took, with permission, several close-ups with the digital camera and used the specimen-collecting high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) vacuum to sample from surfaces of furniture and carpeting where she indicated the "bite" sensations occur most frequently. I assured Mrs. Stuben I would call her within 48 hours with my findings. Also, I referred her to several trusted allergists and physicians competent in human ectoparasitology.

[Confidential Comments: Mrs. Stuben's teenage grandson was visit-

should still be able to hold their own. The move toward measuring quality service through some sort of system (surveys, reports, computer databases, etc.) will continue, and Rollins believes this can only help the industry.

"It's inevitable," he claims. "It's easier to measure with a system, and I think we'll come up with individual ways to measure that will raise the level of quality service."

Rollins also says he believes outside firms will continue to take interest in pest control, citing Sears as a recent example of expanding into the industry. On the commercial side of pest control, he notes, there is a trend toward consolidation, but Rollins adds that there will be room for smaller companies as well.

"I think some of the things that have been true historically are in question going forward," he concludes. "Even though intense personal supervision is important, and owner/operators are still going to thrive, I think we're going to see a lot of medium- and large-sized companies provide (more incentives to retain employees). They're catching on to how important it is to have talented people." □

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punk. He was wearing one of those
personal static electricity generators.

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out in all directions and everyone he
touches gets a nasty shock. He shook
my hand and snickered when I
flinched. I nearly decked the kid.]

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emergence stimulator.

7. One product bar code field
scanner.

**1815 REQUEST FOR ID OF
MICROLEPIDOPTERA COMPLETED—**

Received transmission from
EntoPlex regarding the tiny moth
Mrs. Shapiro (Acct. #00117) brought
continued on next page

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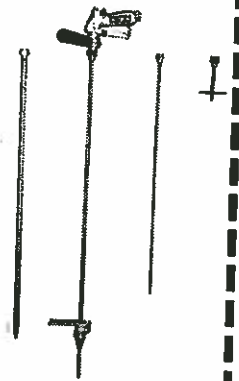
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in. They report a 98 percent level of certainty match with *Pterophorus periscelidactylus* in their file of digitized arthropod-scanning electron micrographs.

1830 RETURNED PHONE CALL TO SALLY AT NATIONAL RENT-A-TECH—

Sally, speaking for the Purdue University program committee, wants a contribution toward a nice gift for Austin Frishman. He is being honored next January at the 70th Purdue Pest Control Conference and his 40th year of attendance.

[Confidential Comments: I hope I'm as fit mentally and physically as Austin Frishman when I'm his age.]

1845 PROOFED SALES PRESENTATION WITH PAT —

I perused Pat's CD-ROM sales presentation for accuracy and inserted two additional digitized,

video sequences to clarify a vague point.

1900 WORKSHIFT TURNOVER PROCE- DURES COMPLETED —

[Confidential Comments: Lord, help us to turn problems into opportunities and please bless our people to think on their feet. Amen.]

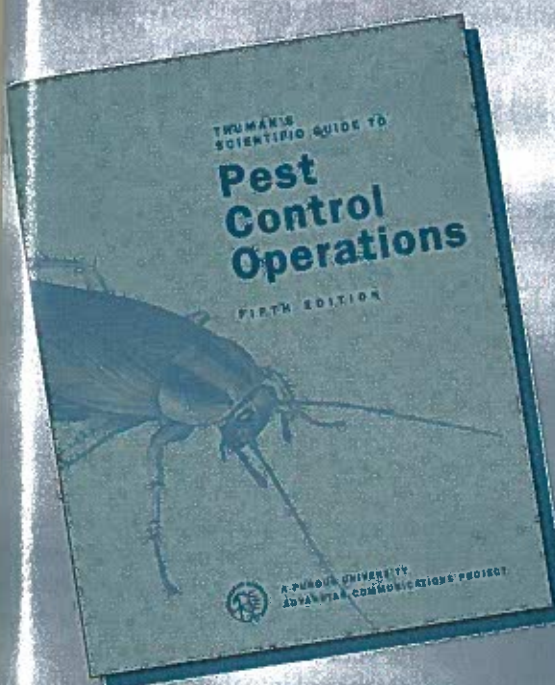
Author's note: The product and corporate names used in this story are intended to be similar, but not identical to actual registered product names or corporate trademarks. Any appearance of an actual product name or corporate trademark is purely coincidental. PC

Dr. Gerald Wegner is technical director and co-owner of Varmint Guard Environmental Services Inc., Columbus, Ohio.

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