

THE INDUSTRY'S LEADING TECHNICAL JOURNAL SINCE 1933

PMP Pest Management PROFESSIONAL

ATTAINING ANT CONTROL

PMP's exclusive
ant management survey
explores how to
achieve success

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our sponsor**

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Controlling ants in complex times

By Dr. Janis Reed, BCE | Control Solutions Inc.

Each year, our job as pest management professional (PMP) service providers seems to become more complex. We have more considerations as they pertain to the products we use, the services we perform, time management, customer satisfaction, and even more recently, the health and safety of technicians as they interact with clients. In addition, technology has become a more important part of our daily operations, with the increased use of mobile devices, electronic service tickets, billing and virtual customer communication platforms. Overall, the industry's focus is nearly stretched to its limits.

The accounts we serve also are increasing in complexity. Each account has unique challenges. Hospitals, health centers, schools, laboratories, food manufacturing and other industries have strict guidelines on products and methods we can use during services. Our clients, in general, have become savvier as it pertains to pesticide active ingredients, application techniques and knowledge of pests. Information is ubiquitously available via a simple Google search.

Complexity extends to the basics, too. Identification, when inspecting for ants, is critical. The United States has a reported 1,000+ species of ants. While most of those are not structure-infesting, thank goodness, the average PMP is likely to encounter a dozen or more structure-infesting species in his or her career. This fact, coupled with the complex biology of the different species of ants, leads to the most difficult part of ant management: identification. The importance of proper identification cannot be overemphasized.

As we move forward, in post-COVID-19 America, how will ant management change? The short answer is these new service limitations will most likely make

things even more complex. Interior services may become a thing of the past. So how will we manage interior infestations of ants? Many species of pest ants live almost exclusively indoors, and typically PMPs need to address them there. If indoor services are performed, personal protective equipment will become vital and, in many cases, entry might be denied.

As our service practices evolve, how will these new service protocols affect the efficacy of ant management? Many ant infestations can be managed from outdoors because the majority of ant infestations originate there.

Going back to the basics with integrated pest management always should be our first priority. Nothing replaces a good inspection. Products such as non-repellent insecticides, dry flowable baits, gel baits, scatter baits, and flushing agents can all assist with ant management when a PMP is limited to an outdoor-only service.

When you are ready to choose and apply an insecticide, Control Solutions Inc. (CSI) wants to be your provider of quality, long-lasting, effective solutions. Our product development team has been hard at work the past few years developing products specifically for ant management.

CSI strives to put products in PMPs' hands to assist in the daily battle with ants. We work daily to help make applications easier for PMPs, and more effective for their customers. We are dedicated to providing the best quality, consistent, reliable and effective products to our suppliers and customers we possibly can. We offer many options as it pertains to ant management, both indoors and outdoors. Please ask your local territory manager or check out [ControlSolutionsInc.com](https://www.controlsolutionsinc.com) for more information on our complete product line.

At CSI, our mission continues to be innovation for the pest management industry: Innovation you can apply.



DR. REED is Technical Services Manager, Product Development Team, for Control Solutions Inc.





Attaining ant control

PMP's exclusive ant management survey explores how to achieve

SUCCESS By **Diane Sofranec** | *PMP* Senior Editor

Count on ants to provide continuous revenue for pest management professionals (PMPs), regardless of location and climate.

“Year after year, ant work continues to grow bigger,” says David Moore, BCE, manager of technical services for Dodson Pest Control, Lynchburg, Va. “It is one of the main reasons why people get recurring pest service.”

Consistently ranked No. 1 as the top revenue-generating pest in *Pest Management Professional's* (*PMP's*) annual State of the Industry report, ants can be a boon for business for PMPs who successfully identify and treat them.

“For PMPs who want to increase their recurring revenue, ant control services are a no-brainer — provided you are willing to provide the proper training for your team members,” says Joseph Edwards, president of North Fulton Pest Solutions, Alpharetta, Ga.

REDUCING CALLBACKS

Training helps ensure technicians can positively identify the species they are dealing with, which is critical to determining an effective treatment method and reducing callbacks.

PMP's 2020 Ant Management Survey shows just 4 percent of the PMPs who responded expect callbacks this year to be worse than callbacks last year.

The steps PMPs take to reduce callbacks are working, as the survey also shows 96 percent of respondents report a callback percentage of 25 percent or less for ant control treatments.

Methods that help keep callbacks in check range from frequent follow-ups with customers to reliable identification tools to extensive technician training.

Paul Wikoff, owner of Total Care Pest Management in Emporia, Kan., says office staff check in with customers shortly after each ant control service. They follow up with a phone call, and if there's an issue, a technician goes back at no charge.

“If all is well, then we lead the conversation through some positive reinforcement and leave on a high mark,” he says. “Since we started the follow-up calls, our referrals and conversions to annual services have skyrocketed.”

Training technicians how to properly identify the ants at a customer's location is well worth the effort, according to Edwards.

“We go to great lengths to provide our technicians with thorough training that includes the correct identification of the ant species and their biology, which in turn allows them to have a better understanding of the ant's foraging habits — along with feeding, nesting and harborage preferences — so that we are confident we are implementing the right treatment strategies,” he explains.

IDENTIFYING SPECIES

With more than 700 species of ants in the United States, according to the National Pest Management

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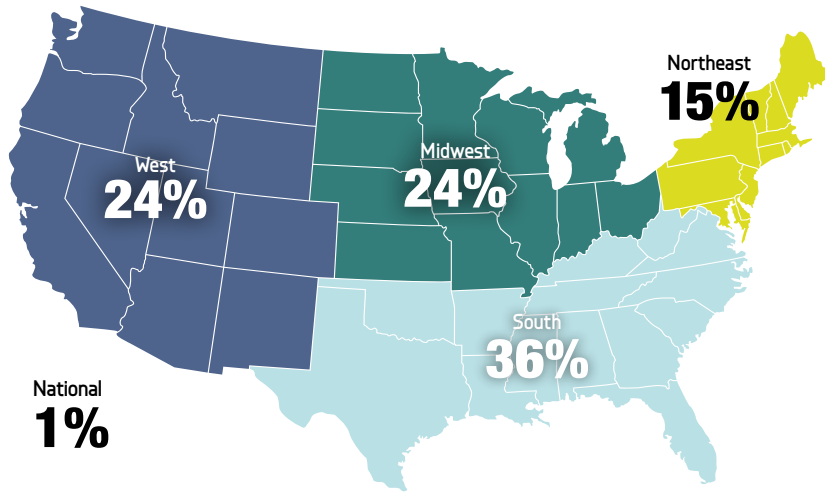
PAUL WIKOFF



Accurate identification is key to ant control, as species dictate treatment strategies.

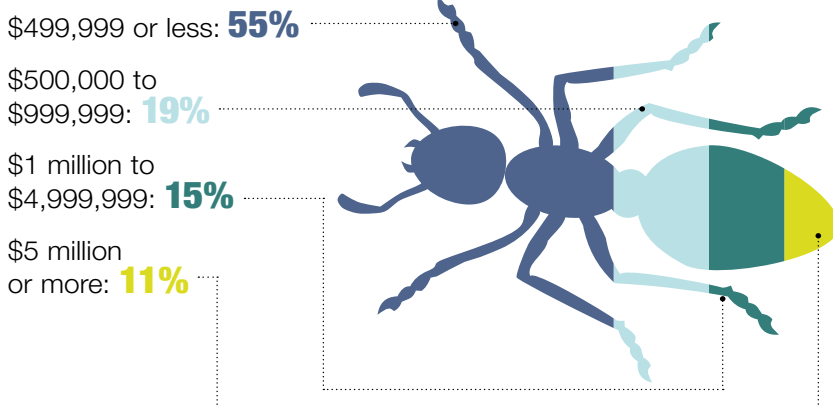
2020 ANT MANAGEMENT SURVEY

AREA OF OPERATIONS

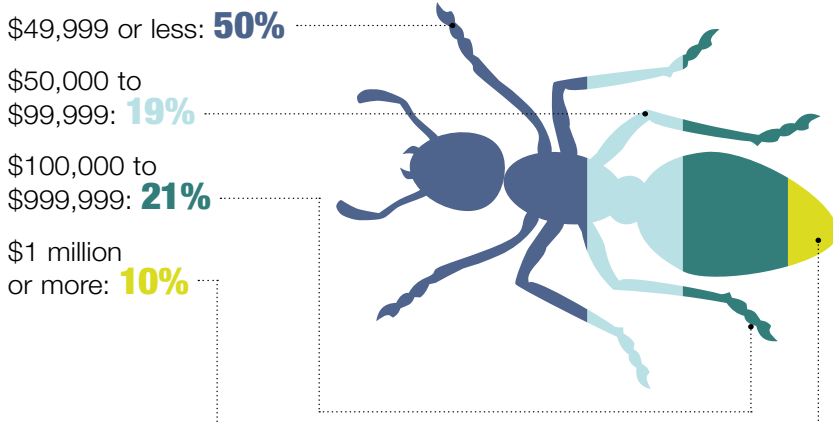


WEST: AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY
MIDWEST: OH, IN, IL, MI, WI, MN, MO, IA, ND, SD, NE, KS
SOUTH: AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV
NORTHEAST: CT, DE, ME, MD, MA, NJ, NH, NY, PA, RI, VT, D.C.

PROJECTED 2020 TOTAL REVENUE



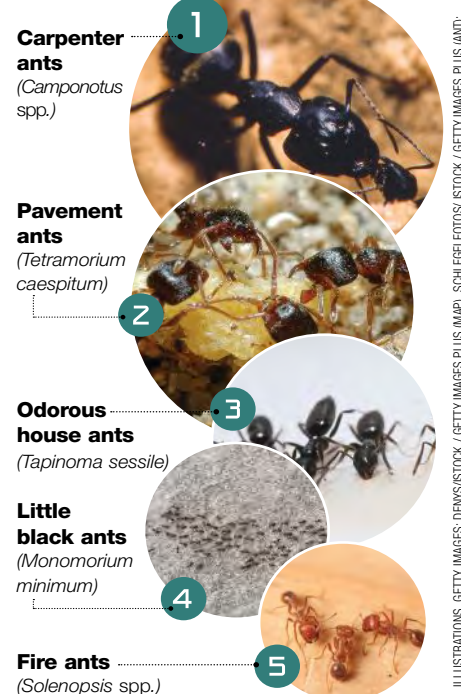
PROJECTED 2020 ANT MANAGEMENT REVENUE



TOP 5 PEST ANTS BY NUMBER OF JOBS GENERATED



TOP 5 PEST ANTS BY NUMBER OF CALLBACKS GENERATED

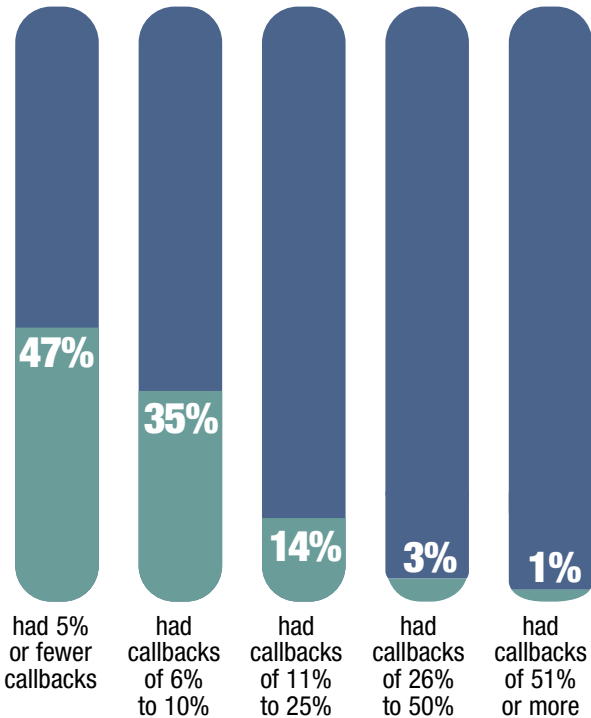


ILLUSTRATIONS: GETTY IMAGES; DEWIS/ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS (ANT); SCHLEGELFOTOS/ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS (ANT); PHOTOS: COURTESY OF, AND COPYRIGHTED BY, GENE WHITE, P.M.I.M.A.G.E.S@EARTHLINK.NET; FOTOTRIPS; CABEZONICACION/ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS/GETTY IMAGES



SOURCE: PMP ONLINE SURVEY CONDUCTED MARCH-APRIL 2020

CALLBACK PERCENTAGE ON NEW ANT TREATMENTS IN 2019

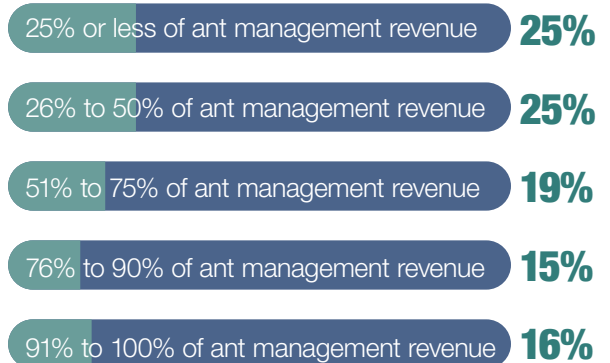


PROJECTED 2020 ANT CALLBACK RATE COMPARED WITH 2019

- 48%** expect improvement
- 48%** expect to remain flat
- 4%** expect to worsen



PROJECTED 2020 ANT MANAGEMENT REVENUE FROM LIQUID TREATMENTS

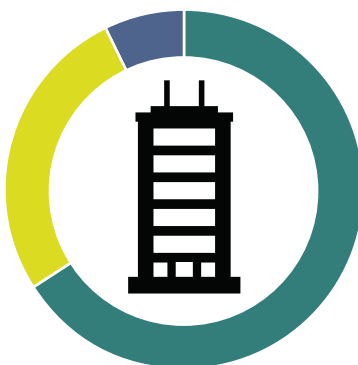


ANT MANAGEMENT REVENUE BY STRUCTURE TYPE



RESIDENTIAL

- 25% or less of ant management revenue: **21%**
- 26% to 50% of ant management revenue: **26%**
- 51% or more of ant management revenue: **53%**



COMMERCIAL

- 25% or less of ant management revenue: **66%**
- 26% to 50% of ant management revenue: **27%**
- 51% or more of ant management revenue: **7%**



GOVERNMENT/ MUNICIPAL

- 25% or less of ant management revenue: **95%**
- 26% to 50% of ant management revenue: **3%**
- 51% or more of ant management revenue: **2%**

ILLUSTRATIONS: GETTY IMAGES - VICTOR/DIGITALVISION VECTORS (PHONE), APPELEZ/DIGITALVISION VECTORS (BUILDINGS)

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Association, technicians who know the species they are dealing with are well on their way to gaining control.

“Proper ant identification is critical to obtain the appropriate results, which ultimately makes for a satisfied customer,” Edwards adds.

PMP’s exclusive survey reveals pavement ants (*Tetramorium caespitum*) are gaining traction as the species responsible for both number of jobs generated and callbacks. This year, they moved up two spots since last year’s survey. As with any pest, the species dictates the treatment method.

“Identifying specific species allows for the proper treatment of ants, and correct products and procedures for eradication and/or control,” says Darrell Seelinger, owner of Oakland Pest Control in Macomb, Mich.

With ants, use of the wrong products and treatment protocols can make an infestation worse. It also can prolong the time it takes to gain control.

“Proper identification of the ant allows you to know its habits,” Moore says. “If you know their habits, you can eliminate the issue faster.”

SATISFYING CUSTOMERS

PMPs who spend time with customers to learn where and when they have seen ants, and demonstrate their expertise by identifying the pest, can help put customers at ease, says Total Care Pest Management’s Wikoff.

“It gives a sense of calm to customers; they know they have called someone who knows what they are

doing,” he says. “In addition, and probably more importantly, it allows the technician to customize the treatment modality to the species of ant.”

These days, PMPs can more easily identify ants out in the field, thanks to smartphone apps that allow them to view such distinguishing features as color, nodes, wings, antennae and habits.

It’s how Edwards equips his technicians, although his staff entomologist can help make an accurate identification if any doubts remain.

For others, like Moore, a jeweler’s loupe and a guidebook can help identify ant species technicians don’t encounter every day.

“You can do simple things like squish them and use the smell to determine species like odorous house ants or citronella ants,” he adds.

A combination of new and old technology allows Wikoff’s technicians to positively identify ants; they use a credit card-sized magnifying glass along with an app.

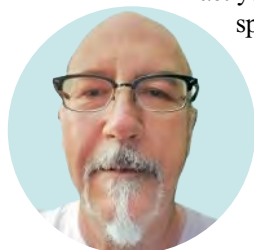
CUSTOMER COMPLIANCE

When it’s time to determine a treatment option, get the customer involved.

“Learn how to guide the customer with structural, cultural and behavioral changes,” says Moore. “These can make a big difference.”

Because gaining control may take time, depending on the infestation and treatment method, it’s critical to communicate your expectations.

“Educating the customer upfront with step-by-step protocols allows us to achieve results in a timeframe within our customer’s expectations,” Edwards says. “When we achieve results the



DARRELL SEELINGER



DAVID MOORE

PRO TIPS FOR ANT CONTROL SUCCESS

DOS

- Do look up. In many cases, ants are either harboring in gutters or entering a structure from something touching the roof. — *David Moore, BCE, Manager, Technical Services, Dodson Pest Control, Lynchburg, Va.*
- Do prepare for the possibility of a nighttime inspection for a better chance of observing the foraging activity of nocturnally active ant species. — *Dr. Gerald Wegner, BCE, Vero Beach, Fla.*
- Do teach your technicians to provide customers with clear and thorough expectations of your ant treatment process. — *Jason Caiazza, District Manager, Pioneer Pest Management, Vancouver, Wash.*

DON'TS

- Don't assume that after the ants are gone, the customer will never experience ants again. Ant populations are fluid and ever-changing. — *David Moore, BCE, Manager, Technical Services, Dodson Pest Control, Lynchburg, Va.*
- Don't use a product without first reading the label to determine whether it is appropriate and legal for the situation. — *Dr. Gerald Wegner, BCE, Vero Beach, Fla.*
- Don't let your customer dictate how or where to treat. — *Dan Scott, Owner, The Bug Guy, Springfield, Mo.*

MORE ONLINE

For additional coverage, please visit PMPestTalk.net.


JOSEPH EDWARDS

customer may have not experienced with a previous company, this builds trust that results in a relationship with the customer that can lead to eventually providing services for all of their pest and wildlife control needs.”

A satisfied customer can be your best advocate. Gaining control of an ant infestation often leads to word-of-mouth referrals to family, friends and neighbors.

“It also can help grow your commercial work if you take care of the decision maker’s house,” Moore notes.

WEATHERING CHANGES

Weather conditions have done little to reduce pest pressure, and customers are quick to call for help when pests appear indoors.

“In general, the first call of the spring season is regarding ants,” Seelinger says. “The level of activity is based on how wet, dry, cold or hot the season begins.”

For more than 10 years, ants have been Edwards’ No. 1 general household pest problem, and he continues to experience a tremendous increase in ant service calls.

“Ants have proven to be successful in adapting to weather conditions, resulting in a continued increase in ant pressure,” he says. “Ant control, by far, has been the fastest growing segment of our company.”

As for Wikoff, rainy spring weather the past two years have kept him busy. Calls for ant control have “gone through the roof,” he says. But he developed a strategy that results in satisfied customers.

“So many people call with ‘ants in my mailbox’ or ‘ants all over my deck’ that we dedicate a week just before ant season really gets going to service all our contracted customers with a preventive treatment,” he says.

Wikoff points out that ant control is best learned by doing, and says the lessons from his six-legged “teachers” have served him well: “You’ve got to slow down and look at the situation really close, because each ant job is different than the one before.” PMP

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

ANT CONTROL DURING A PANDEMIC

The coronavirus pandemic and resulting stay-at-home and shelter-in-place orders changed the way pest management professionals (PMPs) across the country perform pest control. Although they were able to continue to offer

services, thanks to state and federal government declarations that their work is essential, most technicians refrained from entering homes and businesses for health and safety reasons.

PMPs didn’t let a pandemic stop them from offering ant control services at a time when calls for their services began picking up. Joseph Edwards, president of North Fulton Pest Solutions in Alpharetta, Ga., says interior pest control services were conducted only as needed to help keep technicians and customers safe. Even this summer, customers are being asked whether anyone in the home has symptoms or is quarantined. North Fulton technicians also wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

“As we head into the peak of ant season, we are contending with additional safety and treatment protocols brought on by COVID-19,” Edwards says. “So, when our customers are in need of interior ant services, we are prepared to provide those services with the appropriate precautions.”

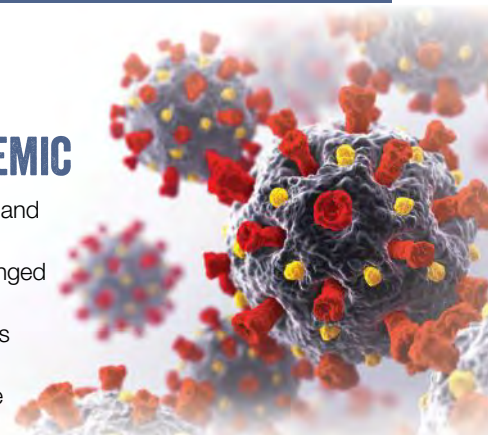
Over the past few years, Edwards’ company got a head start on ant control by implementing exterior foundation treatments so he can stay ahead of ongoing ant pressure.

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the company incorporated an “Enhanced Exterior Treatment Program” that consists of raking ground cover, such as mulch and pine straw, away from a home’s foundation walls because doing so ensures the company gets better results with its foundation treatments. In addition, technicians apply caulk to the openings around utility and plumbing penetrations in the home’s foundation. They also prune shrubs that are in contact with ground-level windows to keep ants from bridging the company’s foundation treatments.

“By cutting off these entry points, we are dramatically reducing interior ant infestations,” he says.

David Moore, manager of technical services for Dodson Pest Control in Lynchburg, Va., says his company also took precautions during the coronavirus pandemic. Additional PPE, cleaning and disinfecting the office, and eliminating in-person meetings with technicians were just a few ways he kept employees and customers safe.

“We had some customers who were very cautious about having people in their homes, which we understood and honored,” he says. “For existing and new clients, we were able to complete service calls without major disruptions. If someone requested a service for ants, we did not have an issue resolving the problem.” — DS





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