

NATIONAL RODENT SURVEY 2009/2010



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National Pest Technicians Association

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INTRODUCTION

This, our eleventh annual national rodent survey report, highlights the fact that rat and mouse control across the UK faces perhaps its most challenging time in a generation.

Serious declines in both local authority participation and rodent treatment levels reflect the major financial pressures the public sector is already under, not to mention the ever-greater national austerity challenges in the pipeline.

As members and officers face up to these acute fiscal challenges we urge them to heed recent Chartered Institute of Environmental Health guidance that increasing charges for pest control services and/or contracting out these services is inconsistent with local authorities' public health responsibilities.

All the evidence suggests that failing to ensure adequate levels of local rodent control can be a seriously false economy given the cost of enforcement action under the Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949 as well as statutory public and environmental health obligations.

Peter Crowden, Chairman, National Pest Technicians Association

FOREWORD

With our over-riding commitment to ensuring the lowest overall cost of pest treatment through the highest quality products applied in the least possible time to the greatest effect, we are playing a central role in helping the UK meet the crucial pest control challenges it so clearly faces.

We fully support the NPTA in its efforts to ensure the invaluable contribution local authorities have always made to rodent control are maintained as firmly as possible despite the all-to-obvious budgetary pressures.

Smarter working between local authority and private sector pest controllers at all levels is essential if our communities are to continue to be adequately protected against the serious threat posed by rat and mouse infestations.

We look forward to playing a major role in bringing this about by supporting pest control professionals as effectively as we can with our specialist expertise in behaviour-led rodent control.

David Marris, Marketing Manager, BASF Pest Control Solutions

CONTENTS

Summary	1
The Survey	2
Rodent Treatment Levels	3
Rodent Treatment Trends	5
Rodent Control Services & Issues	6
Looking Ahead	8
Regional Changes	9



SUMMARY

Local authority economies are posing a major threat to rat and mouse control across the country, our latest annual rodent survey reveals. And unprecedented national austerity measures planned for the coming year are set to make the position markedly worse, raising serious public health concerns.

Not so long ago we would have welcomed the significant fall in professional rodent treatments reported by the public sector in 2009/10 as a sign of success in the constant battle against rats and mice.

Instead, however, the dramatic decline in local authority participation we've seen this year and the extent to which the fall in *like-for-like** treatments is linked with charging levels sound a clear warning for the future.

Just 51% of UK local authorities responded to our established benchmark survey in 2009/10 compared to over 75% in 2008/9 and 2007/8. This reflects the major pressures being placed on public services and suggests far less priority is being given to pest control than in the past amongst many councils.

At the same time, the latest figures reveal that much of the annual fall recorded in like-for-like rat and mouse treatments is associated with local authority charging rather than actual infestation levels.

As charging increases so households and businesses are becoming more reluctant to use the services, leaving infestations untreated for longer and turning to private sector or DIY treatment.

The overwhelming majority of local authorities always used to provide rodent control free of charge as part of their core public health responsibilities. Our latest survey shows that over 60% are now charging for at least some of their rat control services and nearly three quarters for house mouse treatments.

What is more, as they respond to current austerity measures our figures indicate this is likely to rise to more than 75% and 80% respectively over the coming year.

These changes are having a growing effect on our survey figures, making them an increasingly greater reflection of the decline in local authority service provision than any change in national infestation levels.

Indeed, we believe we may have reached a major watershed in this respect, with local authority charging increasing to such an extent that only an unprecedented upsurge in rodent problems could prevent us recording a continued annual decline in public sector treatments.

In parallel to the decline in local authority treatments, our members report a particularly worrying increase in DIY rodent control by householders and businesses. In many cases, poorly managed amateur practice is resulting in growing rat and mouse problems.

We also have immediate worries over the increasingly



reactive and fragmented approach we are seeing to rodent control across the country.

If anything, though, we are even more concerned about the impact public sector cutbacks will be having on the central role local authorities have long played in pest control training and practice development. The full implications of this are unlikely to become evident for eight to 10 years – by which time it will be far too late to take any corrective action.

To face these challenges, we urgently need a sea change in national rodent control practice focused on cost-effective control across communities, with private sector pest controllers and the general public playing increasingly important roles.

All concerned need to do everything possible to avoid encouraging rodents, maintain the most effective treatments and co-ordinate control activities across communities for the greatest overall value.

We all need to think far more creatively and constructively about how we combat the national rodent challenge if far greater problems are not to become an inevitable consequence of declining public sector provision.

We know from bitter experience just how easy it is to let rats and mice off the hook by failing to maintain adequate control. The speed with which they breed leads populations to rapidly grow to levels at which control becomes increasingly difficult and expensive.

If we are not very careful, indeed, short term economic necessities seem set to store up major long-term difficulties and costs for communities across the UK.

*Like-for-like comparisons compare treatment levels for the same local authorities each year to give a more accurate assessment of annual changes.

THE SURVEY



Our National Rodent Control Survey secured responses from a disappointing but still representative cross-section of 51% of the 398 unitary authorities, district, city and borough councils in the UK.

While regrettable, the much lower level of response than the 75%+ of the past two years is hardly surprising given the extent to which local authority staff at all levels have been pre-occupied with the implications of the Government's comprehensive spending review and the seriously increased workloads accompanying them.

As in previous years, our questionnaires were completed by either the Chief Environmental Health Officer or officer responsible for pest control in each local authority.

They provided us with information on the number of separate professional rat and mouse control treatments (defined as complaints or requests where a treatment was actually carried out) undertaken in 2009/10 – either calendar or fiscal year.

The responses have allowed us to make direct like-for-like rat and mouse treatment comparisons with last year, both nationally and for our 15 established regions.



At the same time, we have been able to compare total treatment data for the current year with information from our previous surveys (adjusted for the proportion of local authorities responding in each year) to establish national trends in public sector rat and mouse treatment levels over the past 11 years.

We are confident our survey results present the most accurate assessment possible of the number of rat and mouse control treatments being carried out by local authorities over the years.

However, with the declining extent to which local authorities have been providing rodent control services free of charge in recent years, we have no doubt these figures are now seriously under-estimating the scale of national rodent problems.

Increasing local authority charging is undoubtedly reducing the number of treatments being carried out through the public sector, raising the tolerance of residents to minor infestations and their use of both private companies and DIY treatments once problems become more troublesome.

Alongside the treatment data, local authority responses to a number of topical questions about service arrangements and rodent control issues have continued to improve our national understanding of current and future service provision and rodent problems.

We would like to thank all those environmental health and pest control officers who have taken the time and trouble to provide us with their data, information and views so we are able to maintain the best possible picture of our changing national treatment situation.

We are also extremely grateful to BASF Pest Control Solutions for their invaluable professional support in producing this report.

Full details of the survey and questions asked are available at www.npta.org.uk.



RODENT TREATMENT LEVELS

The total number of professional rodent control treatments reported by UK local authorities in our annual survey more than halved in 2009/10 to just under 230,000.

The main reason for this decrease was the disappointing fall in the number of local authorities reporting figures (just 51% compared to 76% in the previous year).

On a like-for-like basis (comparing reported treatments from only the same local authorities in each year to eliminate these distortions) both brown rat and house mouse treatment levels were still down on 2008/9 but far less dramatically so.

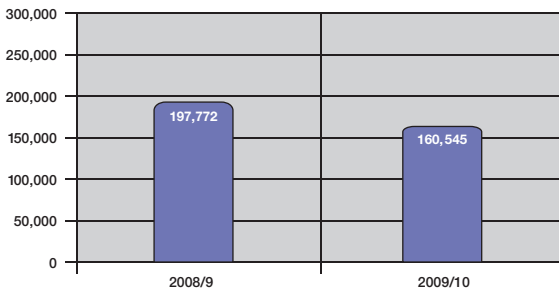
As in previous years, over 70% of the treatments involved rat infestations with less than 30% related to mice, indicating little, if any, change in the relative importance of the two rodent pests.

Brown Rat Problems

At around 164,000, total professional brown rat treatments in 2009/10 were down by 51% on the 337,000-plus reported to us the previous year.

More comparable like-for-like treatment levels at around 161,000 were some 19% below 2008/9 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Like-for-Like Brown Rat Treatments 2008/9 - 2009/10



With the notable exception of Northern Ireland, all our UK regions reported declines in like-for-like rat treatment levels over the year.

The reductions were most marked in London, the East, Midlands, Northern Home Counties and South East, and least apparent in Scotland, the South West and North West (Appendix A).

More detailed analysis shows that a substantial part of these reductions is associated with local authority charging policy rather than actual infestation levels.

Those local authorities who charge for some or all of their rat control work, for instance, recorded a 28% year-on-year reduction in treatment levels. In contrast, those continuing to offer rat control services free of charge saw treatment levels fall by just 9%.

We have no doubt that free service treatment levels provide the best possible benchmark of actual infestation rates, mainly because they are uncomplicated by any financial disincentives to treatment.

On this basis, our 2009/10 figures suggest a welcome annual reduction in rat problems; albeit far less marked than the headline or even like-for-like figures imply.

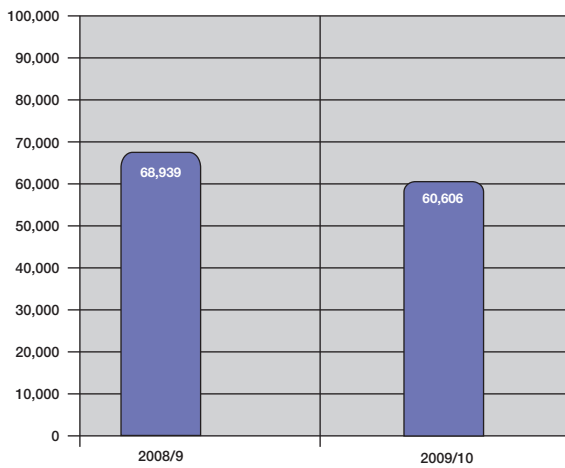
RODENT TREATMENT LEVELS

Mouse Problems

A total of just under 63,000 mouse treatments were recorded by local authorities in our 2009/10 survey. This was 51% below the previous year.

On a like-for-like basis mouse treatments for the year showed a 12% fall on 2008/9 levels to around 61,000 (Figure 2)

Figure 2: Like-for-Like Mouse Treatments 2008/9 – 2009/10



As with rats, every one of our regions except Northern Ireland reported a reduction in house mouse treatment levels over the previous year.

The East, South East and Northern Home Counties experienced the most substantial reductions with Scotland, the North West and East Midlands recording the least marked (Appendix B).

Again our analyses reveal a major part of these reductions is associated with local authority charging policy.

Those local authorities continuing to offer free mouse control services recorded an 8% annual decrease in treatment levels while those charging for all or some of their mouse control saw treatments drop by 15%.



RODENT TREATMENT TRENDS

Adjusting reported treatments for the response rate in the year, we calculate 2009/10 saw around 445,000 total local authority rodent treatments across the UK.

This is 27% below 2008/9, the lowest total level in 11 years of our surveying and the first time total treatments have declined for two years in a row.

Both rat and mouse treatment levels fell by the same amount – to around 321,000 and 124,000 respectively, reinforcing the impression that factors beyond infestation levels are having an increasing influence on the results (Figures 3 & 4).

We have always been aware that, being confined to local authority treatments alone, our figures inevitably under-estimate the scale of rat and mouse problems across the country.

Information from our annual surveying and feedback from members in both local authority and private practice has underlined the extent to which local authority rodent control treatment has been declining in recent years as a result of financial pressures.

The overwhelming majority of local authorities always used to provide rodent control free as part of their public health responsibilities.

Over the past decade, though, increasing numbers have been forced to either abandon their service provision entirely or make charges for rat and mouse treatments. To such an extent that, amongst those responding to our survey, this year over 60% are charging for some or all of their rat control services and nearly three quarters are doing so for house mouse treatment.

Not surprisingly, this has resulted in a progressive increase in the number of households and businesses turning to private pest controllers, doing their own treatments or putting off treatments until infestations reach intolerable levels.

These trends have undoubtedly been having a growing effect on our survey figures, making them an increasingly greater reflection of the decline in local authority service provision than any change in national infestation levels.

We believe we may have reached an unprecedented watershed in this respect, with local authority charging increasing to such an extent that only a major upsurge in rodent populations could prevent a continued annual decline in recorded public sector treatments.

This is reinforced by the fact that over 40% of local authorities see greater charging for both rat and mouse treatment for the coming financial year as an inevitable consequence of Government economies.



Figure 3: Total National Rat Treatments (1999/00 – 2009/10) *

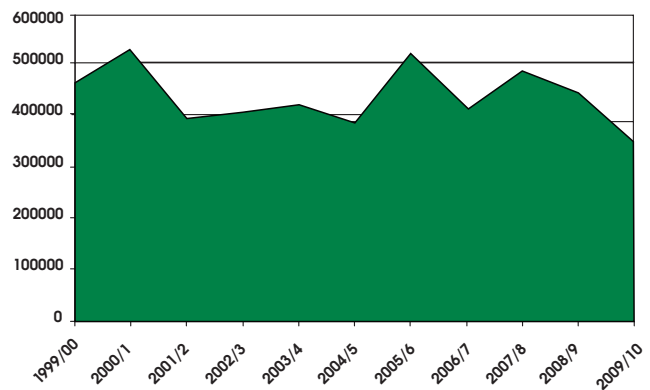
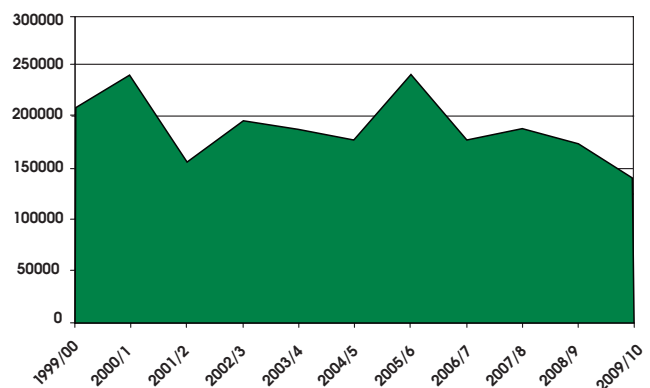


Figure 4: Total National Mouse Treatments (1999/00 – 2009/10) *



* Total reported treatments in each year adjusted to a national level on the basis of the percentage of local authorities responding.



RODENT CONTROL SERVICES & ISSUES

Responses to the series of additional questions we posed in this year's survey paint a good picture of how local rodent control service provision is changing while giving a quantitative as well as qualitative assessment of the key factors behind continuing national rodent problems.

Response Rates

The fact that only 51% of the 398 local authorities in the country responded to this year's survey, compared to 76% in 2008/9 and 80% in 2007/8, is a matter for serious concern.

It almost certainly reflects the major pressures being placed on local Government services in the past year, in particular, as well as substantial changes in specific service responsibilities.

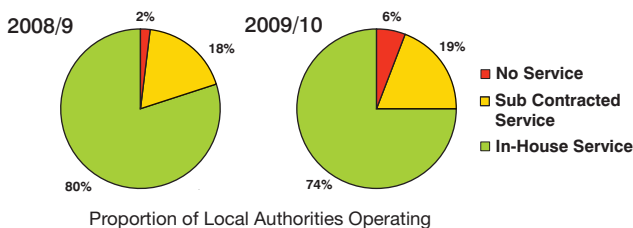
We can only see this dramatic decline in involvement in what is an extremely simple to complete survey as confirmation of the decreasing importance being attached to pest control as a whole amongst local authorities facing the greatest financial challenges in a generation.

Local Service Provision

Despite the economic pressures to date, we are encouraged to see around three quarters of UK local authorities continuing to maintain their own professional services for both rat and mouse control. Although, for how long they will be able to do so remains a critical question.

Even ahead of the planned cutbacks in response to national austerity measures, however, we have seen what could well be the start of a major decline in in-house service provision and increase in the proportion of authorities no longer providing any sort of rodent control service in the past year (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Local Authority Rodent Control Service Organisation

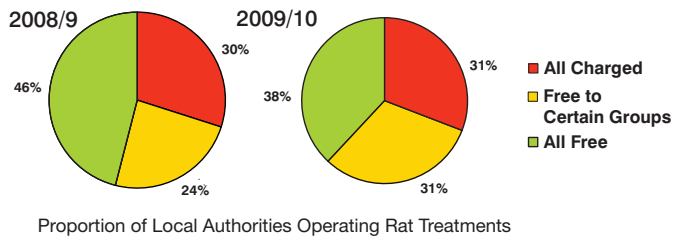


Rodent Control Charges

Already we see the extent to which local authorities are providing rodent control services free of charge declining markedly in the past year; especially so as far as rats are concerned.

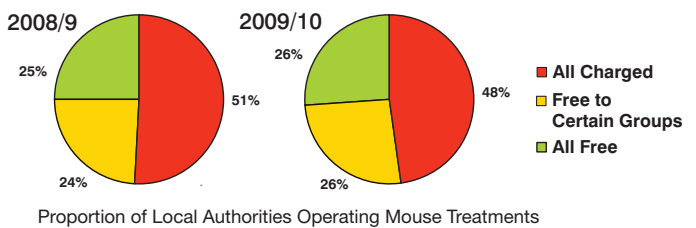
While 46% of councils were providing all their rat control services free of charge in 2008/9, only 38% were doing so in 2009/10 (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Local Authority Rodent Control Service Charging



Thankfully few, if any, changes were apparent in the proportion of local authorities charging for mouse control. This is probably because of the far greater extent to which charges have been levied to date (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Local Authority Mouse Control Service Charging



The increasing emphasis on local authority charging almost certainly means more households and businesses turning to private contractors, undertaking their own treatments or delaying local authority treatment requests until problems become acute.

Our real worry in this respect, though, has to be what will happen when the local Government cutbacks really begin to bite in the coming fiscal year.

We are particularly concerned about DIY treatments. Our members called out to tackle persistent problems find householders and businesses frequently failing to do their own rat or mouse control well enough.

DIY treatments also suffer from the fact that they are invariably undertaken on an individual premises basis. This allows many rats to survive because their entire territories are not covered by the baiting, leaving more survivors to multiply and rapidly re-infest their immediate neighbourhoods and encouraging the development of rodenticide resistance.

Future Rodent Control Plans

Our concerns are heightened by the way in which local authorities are planning to alter their rodent control services in response to the current round of economies forced upon them by national austerity measures.

Over 40% consider it likely their residents will see greater charging in the case of both rats and mice – either charges extended to a wider range of households or businesses or increased rates (Figure 8).



Figure 8: Local Authority Responses to Current Government Economies



Proportion of Local Authorities Likely to Increase Charging

This will clearly have a major effect on the proportion of local authorities charging for services.

Indeed, the four in every 10 of those currently providing all rat treatments free who tell us they are likely to increase charging suggests free control provision may well decline from its current level of 38% of local authorities to less than 25%.

In the same way, free house mouse control provision seems set to drop from its current 26% of local authorities to just 18%.

Key Rodent Control Issues

Officers again identified the three main causes of rodent problems as over-feeding of wild birds, defective drains and sewers and sewers and poorly managed domestic waste.

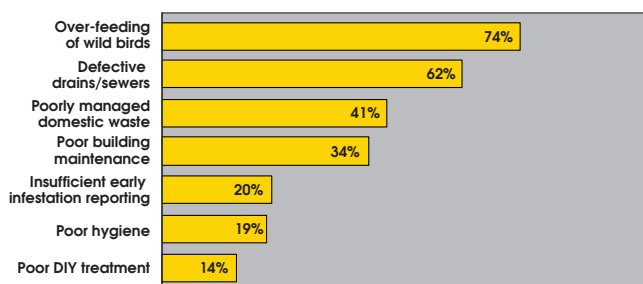
Interestingly, however, while 83% of respondents saw wild bird feeding as a key issue in rodent management in 2008/9, only 74% did so in our current survey. In the same way domestic waste management was only seen as major factor by 41% of officers rather than the 48% identifying it the previous year.

We welcome what seem to be clear signs of improvement in both important respects. They suggest householders and local authority waste managers are responding to the problems we have identified over several years of surveying by taking active steps to reduce the ready availability of rodent food sources.

Sadly, the same cannot be said of drain and sewer maintenance, the proportion of officers highlighting defects in this area having risen from 55% in 2008/9 to 62% currently.

At the same time, our 2009/10 survey pinpoints a number of additional factors contributing to rodent problems. These include poor building maintenance, insufficiently early reporting of infestations, poor hygiene and poor DIY treatment (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Main Causes of Rodent Problems 2009/10



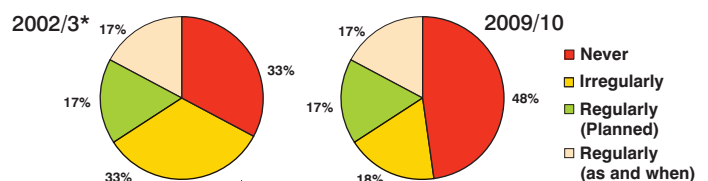
Proportion of officers citing

The growing importance of drain and sewer management as a rat control issue, in particular, is emphasised by the extent to which vital liaison between local authorities and water companies over sewer baiting appears to have broken down over recent years.

In 2002/3 a benchmark local authority pest management survey conducted on behalf of the National Pest Advisory Panel of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) revealed that a disappointing third of water companies never liaised with local authorities over sewer baiting to ensure maximum control efficacy. And of those that did have some liaison the majority was only irregular.

Our survey seven years later reveals nearly half of local authorities now never see sewer baiting liaison from water companies (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Water Company Sewer Baiting Liaison



Proportion of Local Authorities Reporting Water Company Liaison

* Data from Local Authority Pest Management Services in the UK, R. Gai Murphy & Stephen Battersby, Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Urban Pests, 2005.

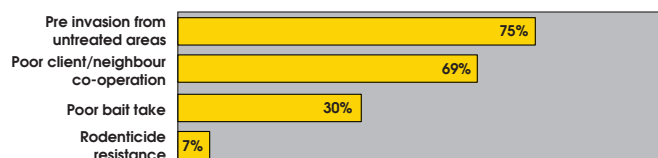
Uncoordinated baiting allows some rats to survive treatment because it seldom extends across their entire territory, enabling infestations to rapidly re-establish themselves. This has to be a particular cause for concern at a time when resources are so tight and further cutbacks appear inevitable.

Treatment Failures

Confirming the problem of lack of co-ordination in modern rodent control, two thirds of officers see re-invasion from untreated areas as the Number One reason for current treatment failures. And nearly as many highlight the related-problem of poor co-operation with clients and neighbours.

Poor bait take is considered an issue by less than a third of our respondents and rodenticide resistance, thankfully, by a very small minority (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Main Causes of Treatment Failures



Proportion of officers citing

LOOKING AHEAD



We believe the UK is in real danger of losing control over both rats and mice across much of the country. Especially so if, as widely anticipated, the most swingeing Government austerity measures in a generation further undermine the ability of local authorities to provide the most co-ordinated professional control possible.

Thankfully, we continue to have an armoury of highly effective and well-proven rodenticides at our disposal, together with one of the most experienced networks of professional pest controllers in the business.

Yet rodent control in both domestic and commercial properties appears to be becoming ever more reactive and fragmented in response to serious financial pressures on local authorities, householders and businesses alike.

We are particularly worried by the extent to which local authorities which have been the backbone of UK rat and mouse control training and development are being forced to cut back on the services that always used to be seen as essential to public health.

More concerning even than the immediate impact of these cutbacks on UK rodent problems is the effect they will have on curtailing local authorities' central role in the pest controller training and pest control practice development on which the industry has long relied.

This means the full implications are unlikely to become evident for eight to 10 years – by which time it will be far too late to take any corrective action.

Under these circumstances, we urgently need a sea change in national rodent control practice if we are not to face a future of very much greater rodent-related problems on all fronts; especially so as the cost of treatment leads to growing delays in tackling infestations and a progressive shift to poorer DIY practice.

Cost-effective control across communities must be our key objective, with private sector pest controllers playing an increasingly important role.

All concerned need to do everything possible to avoid encouraging rodents, employ the more effective treatments themselves and co-ordinate their work as effectively as possible across the private and public sectors for the greatest overall community value.

Individual pest control officers cannot afford anything less than the very best baiting practice. If the rodent populations they are treating have access to other food sources outside their control or have reached particularly high levels, for instance, it is essential to employ the most appealing, palatable and arresting baits.

We have no doubt that the very best baits and baiting practice need to go hand in hand with better co-operation between pest controllers working for different businesses and clients.

Such smarter working will make the most of every treatment by ensuring operations on adjacent premises and across the sewer network are conducted simultaneously for the most effective control.

We do not under-estimate the challenge of getting different householders or businesses, let alone competing pest control teams, to co-operate in this way. However, it has to be in the interest of all concerned – as well as the community as a whole.

Why don't local authorities take on more of a co-ordinating function in this as they increasingly pull back from their historic hands-on pest treatment role? After all, this might be a way of maintaining their public health responsibilities, as well as preserving the local environment so important to voters, in the new world.

Equally, some local authority pest control teams would undoubtedly be well placed to provide more pest control training services for the private sector, helping to boost local capabilities as well as generating valuable extra income.

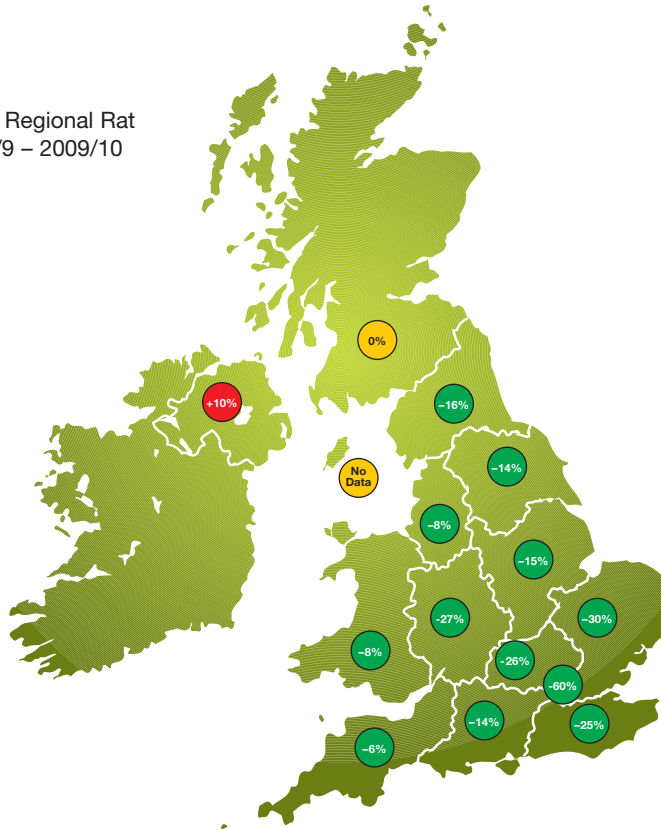
Whatever our industry does, we all need to think far more creatively and constructively about how we work both individually and together if far greater rodent problems are not to become an inevitable consequence of the changing public sector.

We know from bitter experience just how easy it is to let rats and mice off the hook by failing to maintain adequate control. The speed with which they breed leads populations to rapidly grow to levels at which control becomes increasing difficult and expensive.

If we are not very careful, indeed, short term economic necessities seem set to store up major long-term difficulties and costs for many communities across the UK.

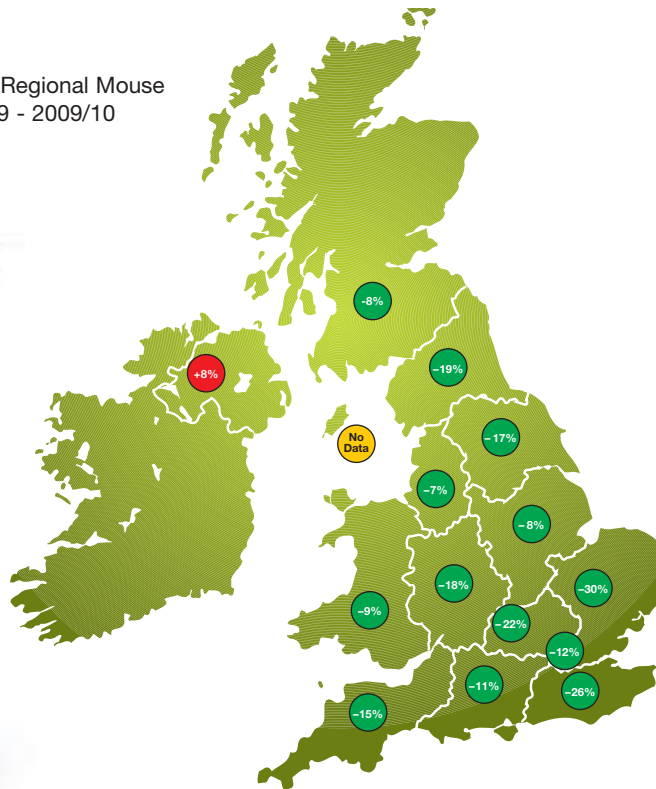
REGIONAL CHANGES

Appendix A: Like for Like Regional Rat Treatment Changes 2008/9 – 2009/10



Scotland	0%
Isle of Man	No Data
Northern Ireland	+10%
North England	-16%
Yorkshire	-14%
North West	-8%
East Midlands	-15%
Midlands	-27%
Wales	-8%
East England	-30%
Northern Home Counties	-26%
London	-60%
South East	-25%
South	-14%
South West	-6%

Appendix B: Like for Like Regional Mouse Treatment Changes 2008/9 - 2009/10



Scotland	-8%
Isle of Man	No Data
Northern Ireland	+8%
North England	-19%
Yorkshire	-17%
North West	-7%
East Midlands	-8%
Midlands	-18%
Wales	-9%
East England	-30%
Northern Home Counties	-22%
London	-12%
South East	-26%
South	-11%
South West	-15%



This report, together with a copy of the 2009/10 questionnaire and list of local authorities involved are published at www.npta.org.uk.

Copies of the report are also available at www.pestcontrol.basf.co.uk



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