



## Experts present pest control solutions to protect CRE assets

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New York, NY Addressing the city's worsening "high profile" pest problems, BOMA New York's February monthly forum featured experts who presented an integrated pest management approach to protect building owners' assets and property values.

Glenn Waldorf and Dan Brady of Bell Environmental Services opened their presentation with a stark description of a post-COVID pest crisis in New York City. They did not sugarcoat the situation.

Waldorf cited statistics on growing rodent problems and graphic news media coverage, including the "Bed Bug Mania" of 2010; video clips of mice "eating veal in the meat department," of the Whole Foods supermarket at 1 Columbus Circle in May 2021 – and the story of Queens firefighters who were forced to abandon their rat-infested quarters in 2003. Waldorf said, "Rats have been here for 300 years. They scared New York's Bravest out of their firehouse!"

Then, citing their firm's experience in the tri-state region since its founding in 1963, Waldorf and Brady described how property owners, working with their tenants, can gain the upper hand. Their approach, best described as "minimal chemical; maximum physical," is highly proactive.

First, owners must realize the extent of the pest problem. Over a recent four-year period, the city has logged a 55% increase in rat complaints. “There are more people, more packaging, more restaurant deliveries, and more outdoor dining,” Waldorf said.

Waldorf said, “COVID changed everything including animal behavior, and pests spread out and found their way into new buildings. Meanwhile offices scaled back on cleaning. When employees moved out, maintenance was cut back.” This, in turn, triggered staff layoffs at pest control companies. “During the recovery, it was hard to get these workers to come back.”

Second, according to the experts, “Owners should be prepared to spend appropriately with a reputable company that delivers great service.” Proper, integrated pest management involves careful identification of problems and continuous monitoring of threat levels in occupied and less trafficked areas.

Most importantly, owners and managers should focus on keeping pests out of their buildings. To that end, Waldorf said, “Keep the place clean, dry, and use traps. Manage trash and landscaping. Don’t give rats any reasons to be there.”

Both experts urged owners to use physical barriers against pests. For example, sealing cracks and crevices, and keeping refuse containers pest-proof, are as important as reacting with pesticides and chemicals.

An integrated pest management program starts with an inspection. Waldorf said, “When the vendor arrives at your building, he should be carrying a flashlight.”

Inspection should be followed by a rigorous tracking and monitoring service. “Don’t spray and pray,” Waldorf said. “Hold your vendor accountable. One visit a month is not enough.” Citing Local Law 37 of 2008, he also said that privately owned buildings with City agency tenants cannot use certain common pesticides based on their toxicity and potential harm to humans.

The experts also stressed the need to pay special attention to vacant floors. “Workmen leave trash and food behind.” Waldorf continued, “Control trash and insist that workmen carry out their garbage at the end of each day.”

Likewise, both experts said that tenants also must be held accountable. Cleanliness is paramount. Also, drains in tenant spaces should be washed and kept filled with water. Pests move from floor to floor through dry drainpipes, but a water barrier will stop them.

The presentation also included a discussion of problems caused by birds, a pest management area in which Brady is a specialist. He said, “Birds are our friends outside the building that we don’t want to harm.”

He also noted that it’s illegal to harm birds, and that Local Law 15 of 2020 states that effective January 10, 2021, new buildings and alterations that replace all exterior glazing of a building must

comply with bird friendly design construction requirements.

That said, Brady cautioned, “Birds make messes, cause damage and transmit disease, especially respiratory diseases linked to pigeons.” He added, “Birds send an ugly message to investors, tenants, customers, and employees about your property.”

Therefore pigeons, sparrows, and gulls, like other pests, should be “relocated” and kept away from buildings. Brady listed systems to control birds, such as netting, spikes and electrical systems that give a small shock to induce behavior modification.

Overall, the experts concluded that pest problems can be devastating to reputations and property values. The most effective solutions include vigilance by owners; the implementation of best practices for keeping pests away from buildings; and strict accountability for vendors and tenants alike.

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