

Special Feature

An Entomologist's Life in the Pest Management Industry

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Upon finishing my undergraduate degree, I went to work for E.L. Bruce Co. in Memphis, TN in their Technical Department as an entomologist. I was assigned to the Terminix Division. At that time there were only two entomologists on staff.

In 1956 Terminix was 100% franchised and my main job was to provide technical assistance to the licensees from coast to coast. Most of the requests called for training pest control and termite technicians as to how to properly treat structures according to Terminix standards. Salesmen were also given this training so they could knowledgeably sell services to customers.

Training programs were developed utilizing 35 mm slide lectures on how to properly treat structures. In just a few months we had produced several programs and our small technical department was flooded with requests from licensees for training seminars. The two of us were kept on the road giving two-day seminars from coast to coast.

As Terminix grew so did the demands on the Technical Department. Terminix added entomologists specializing in certain phases of technical duties, one in general pest management and the other in termite control. Courses were developed for training pest control technicians and termite control technicians. They were required to complete these courses, including written examinations, before they were released to go on their routes.

A Technical Director and I wrote the original Pest Control Manual which is still in use after 42 years. It illustrated and gave general information on insects that technicians would encounter in their daily activities and gave them a quick reference to answer customer questions. A termite manual was written by another entomologist guiding termite technicians through their daily routines.

As the years went on, licensees retired and sold their franchises back to Corporate Terminix. Those franchises that grew to enormous sizes were taken over by family offspring. They developed their own technical departments and hired technical specialists to make sure the franchise conformed to Corporate Terminix standards.

As company-owned branches continued to develop in large numbers, Terminix split the country into East, West and Central Divisions. Within each division regions were developed, each with their own Technical Specialist to train technicians and to make sure each office in a region conformed to company, state and federal guidelines in termite and pest control treatments and proper chemical storage.

My duties were two-fold; over the span of 42 years I gained knowledge in specialized fields such as breweries, distilleries, pharmaceutical operations, meat and poultry operations, food processing plants, hospitals, museums and zoos.

All of these operations had very sensitive areas where pesticides could not be used. In such cases we would have to resort to mechanical means of control. There were many cases where I worked with the maintenance department recommending screens for windows, making screen caps for roof vents and installing air doors for open doors. We even used sound devices aimed over conveyor belt openings into plants to keep out rodents, which worked.

Some of these plants came under the jurisdiction of FDA and USDA. In order to treat these plants one had to have knowledge of their regulations. Most of these food industry accounts were very large operations and Terminix would send me to initially program the plant and set up the treatment plan. These accounts were located from coast to coast and a great deal of travel was involved.

My main responsibility was to the Central Division, Mid-South Region. Typically, a region could have from 16 to 30 branches, and some of the larger cities had multiple branches. These cities were Chicago, Memphis, Nashville, Birmingham, Dallas, San Antonio and Oklahoma City. I might spend three days in these cities monitoring 2 to 3 branches. I met with the branch manager and service manager. I would monitor customer complaints and help solve them if needed. The state operation license was checked and I acted as liaison between Terminix and the state officials. Training records were monitored for timely training completion. Chemical inventory was reviewed to be sure proper materials were being used for particular services. Truck equipment was checked to be sure it was in good working order.

I would ride for a few hours with the service technicians who were having problems and make recommendations. Usually a service meeting was held to review technicians' questions, introduce new equipment and chemicals, or new treating techniques.

I had the opportunity to field-test materials and equipment for several major chemical companies. Sometimes I worked directly with their chemists and entomologists offering solutions to problems that might occur with their products in the field.

R & D was a big part of my work. Using selected branches, testing was done on various soil types, various surfaces, and in hot, cold or humid conditions. I worked with USDA lab entomologists around the country on projects of interest to the pest management industry. I acted as liaison between Terminix and various universities which performed research in the fields of entomology and chemistry.

Another duty I became involved in was technical assistance to the Corporate Terminix legal department. They maintained a staff of attorneys that coordinated and oversaw lawsuits that various branches around the country became involved in. Many times I had to testify in court on treatment techniques, entomology and chemical reactions on surfaces and in soil. That was the part of my work I disliked the most as I was never comfortable in courtrooms.

Environmental Surveys of commercial accounts with areas sensitive to chemicals involved analyzing sanitation problems and suggesting solutions in their pest management programs. These surveys were done quarterly so as to stay ahead of small problems before they became major. Surveys involved analyzing problems with the account customer, developing a written report for customer management, pointing out sanitation problems and making suggestions to solve problems. I lectured on Environmental Surveys at various conferences, such as National Pest Management Association, Purdue University, some state conferences, and the Brewmasters Convention. These lectures became a large part of my job in the latter years of my career.

In more recent years, research has moved away from pesticide use and more toward forms of biological control, a boon to the environment.

My life with Terminix was very gratifying. I made many friends from all walks of life, many of whom I stay in contact with.

For those young people looking for a challenge in entomology I would recommend a career in R & D or teaching.

