

cause blindness, even death, after it penetrates the human brain. So when handling pests, it's better to be safe than sorry.

Equipment information

Most trapping experts agree that safety is also important in handling traps, particularly the lethal variety. That's why many PCOs choose either a one- or two-door live cage trap.

Critter Control's Clark prefers one-door traps because they are stronger, more effective, less expensive, easier to handle and quicker to set than two-door types. Moreover, they have fewer mechanical problems and don't close prematurely.

Some two-door traps feature sheet metal on the top and both ends, allowing the PCO to approach a skunk, for instance, without being seen or sprayed.

The size of the trap will also directly affect the trapper's success. Make sure the trap matches the pest's size. If not, you might capture, or possibly injure, a non-target animal.

Using a trap too small for your intended target animal will allow the animal to back out of the trap, hence evading capture, when the trap is set off. The door will land on its back, making escape possible. This problem occurs frequently with raccoons, so it's critical to match the proper size trap to your target animal.

In addition to traps, there are other tools of the nuisance animal trade. An animal control stick, equipped with a snare, is typically used to handle an animal.

If the nuisance animal must be destroyed, PCOs often use a jab stick with a controlled chemical substance on the tip. PCOs must have a state license to use controlled substances, which include T-61, sodium pentobarbital and beuthenasia.

If the PCO doesn't want to destroy the pest himself, he can take it to a veterinarian. Regardless of the method of destruction, it must be quick and humane.

People business

While equipment, trapping basics and safety are all impor-

tant to nuisance animal control, PCOs must keep in mind that this is a "people" business. Communication and customer relations are key, says Gary Metzger, a part-time PCO and owner of Gary's Trap Repair in Lancaster, Pa.

"People love to have things explained to them," says Metzger, who has deployed as many as 150 cage traps at one time. "They can't wait until the next morning to see what's in the trap."

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GARY'S TRAP REPAIR
LANCASTER, PA.

Many PCOs also underestimate the time and labor involved. Depending on several factors, the market, season and project's complexity, to name a few, a PCO can spend anywhere from one to several hours a day solving nuisance animal problems.

Though it takes only one person to set and handle a trap, it takes a patient and persistent PCO to successfully control these pests. Trapping a squirrel, for instance, can take a few days, even weeks, of constantly rechecking and rebaiting the trap.

The important thing is to provide the customer with a realistic estimate up front and finish the job as quickly and effectively as possible.

Because some traps may become damaged or even vandalized during use, it's a good idea to require a deposit (say \$25 per trap) from the customer before the trap is set. The deposit can easily be returned after the job is completed.

Generally, a pest control company doesn't need to hire additional staff to enter the nuisance

animal business. But current employees should receive proper training to diagnose and solve pest problems.

On the other hand, if these challenges become too complex or time consuming, hiring a full-time nuisance animal technician may be necessary, according to Critter Control's Clark.

PCOs don't need to make a sizable investment (less than \$1,000) in equipment. A few cage traps, set of ladders, pair of durable gloves and appropriate bait are enough to get you started. You may also need an open-air pickup truck to relocate or transport nuisance animals, although most PCOs already have one.

PCO rewards

This business can be financially rewarding, but not quite as profitable as traditional pest control. According to Clark, most nuisance animal technicians charge between \$25 and \$30 an hour, while traditional PCOs use a \$50-75 hourly rate.

Nuisance animal control has other rewards, too. Every case is a little different, and every day offers a unique challenge. Plus, there's the opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors and handle wildlife, which can be a lot more interesting than roaches and rodents.

But the true reward is satisfying the customer by removing the furry pest that has wrecked the vegetable garden, trashed the garbage, damaged the attic wiring and insulation or nipped at the children.

Metzger discovered this while serving as a full-time police sergeant in Lancaster, Pa. He and his department often receive calls from citizens who need to control nuisance animals in their homes and backyards.

"I feel I'm doing a service for people by taking care of their (nuisance animal) problems," he says. That's what this business is all about. **PC**

The photos for this article, as well as the cover photo, are courtesy of Woodstream Corp.