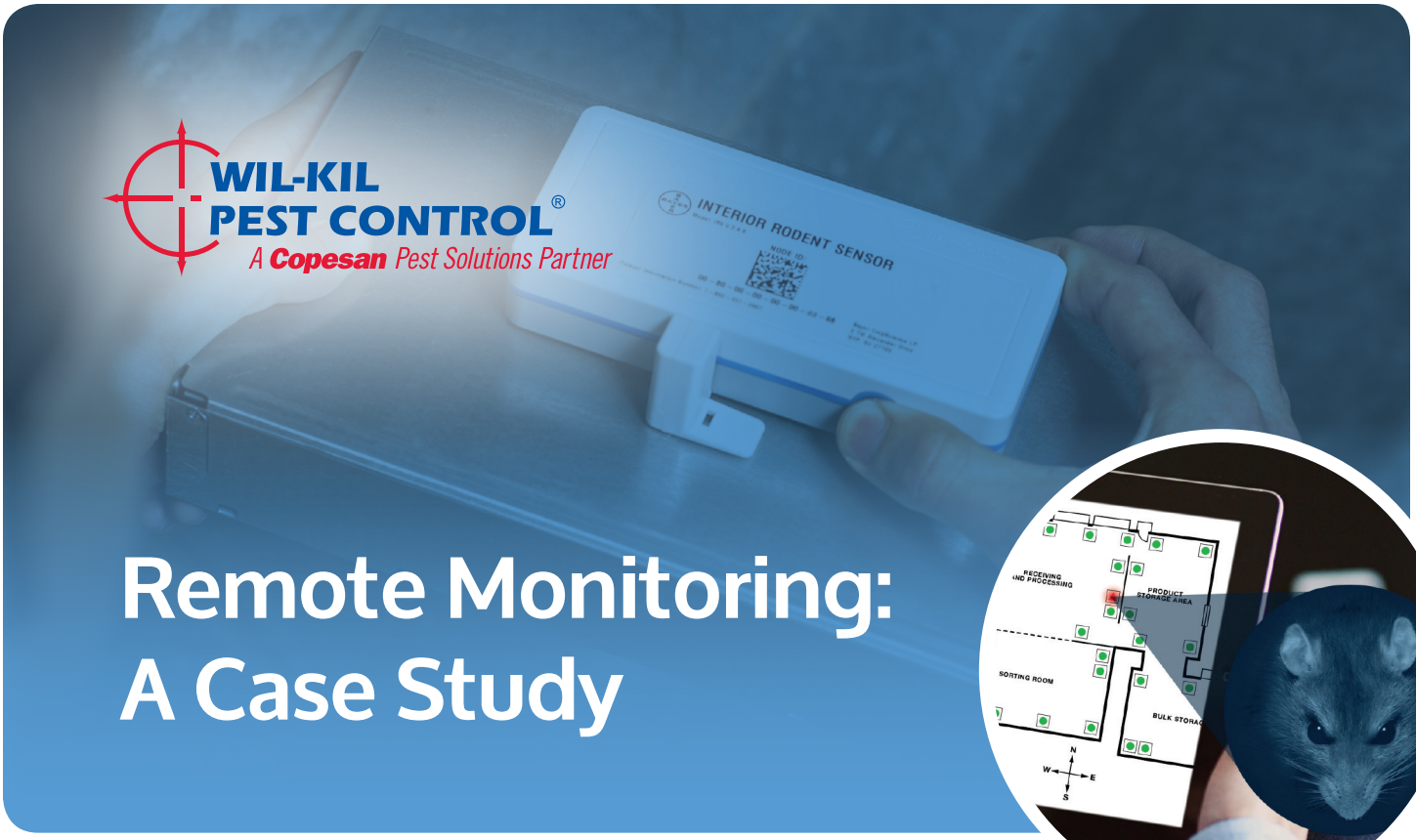
WIL-KIL PEST CONTROL®
A Copesan Pest Solutions Partner



Remote Monitoring: A Case Study

Potential is often defined as talent that has yet to prove itself. And with all the talk about the potential of remote monitoring technology to improve the effectiveness and performance of rodent management programs, it is time to see what that potential holds.

Wil-Kil Pest Control, a Copesan Pest Solutions Partner, in Menomonee Falls, Wisc., is embracing remote monitoring technology and deploying it with success for select commercial clients.

Shane McCoy, director of quality and technical training for Wil-Kil, says remote monitoring is changing the way he and his technicians are performing rodent management.

Wil-Kil started its work with remote monitoring technology in November 2016 when a food processing client – a confectionery manufacturing facility – agreed to participate in a trial program.

The program called for replacing the facility's 77 interior rodent trap devices with those featuring remote monitoring capabilities. The devices contained a wireless system with high tech sensors that provided 24/7 monitoring, real-time capture alerts, and up-to-the minute rodent program verification through an online portal.

The goal of the program was to provide a rapid response tool that could determine root cause analysis, improve audit readiness and compliance, and minimize business disruption for the client.

Initially, Wil-Kil continued to service the devices on a weekly basis according to their standards and the terms of the service contract. After one year of testing, McCoy met with the plant's QA manager to determine the next steps in the process and where remote monitoring fit into the facility's long-term rodent management program.

Photos courtesy of
Bayer Digital Pest Management

"The QA manager's primary concern was being able to pass the critical second- and third-party audits," says McCoy. "Would the use of a remote monitoring program satisfy the audit standards requirements and would the individual auditor agree with the decisions that were made based on the data collected."

McCoy says they decided to keep everything like it was with the program until the facility's next audit. Following the audit – on which the facility received a 100 percent score on the pest control elements – the auditors indicated they were comfortable with the performance of remote monitoring devices.

With this demonstration of confidence in remote monitoring technology from the auditing agency, McCoy and the client reviewed other benefits to determine the right next steps, including peace of mind and time efficiencies.

"After their audit, we reduced services from once a week to once a month," says McCoy. "Now our technician does not have to check all 77 devices on a weekly basis, but rather on a monthly schedule to ensure they are clean and operating properly."

The reduction of service time for interior devices allows the technician to spend more time performing thorough inspections and focusing treatments on areas that are more vulnerable to rodent and other pest activity.

Results in Real Time

This fall, McCoy experienced first-hand the speed that remote monitoring possesses and how it impacted Wil-Kil's reaction.

Early one afternoon while sitting at his desk, McCoy received a capture alert from a monitor located in the facility. Within 40 minutes, Wil-Kil was able to have a technician on-site to evaluate the situation.

McCoy was concerned the trap might have provided a false reading since his technician had just been at the plant the day before performing regular service. When the technician arrived, it was confirmed the trap – which was positioned near an entry door that is sometimes propped open during deliveries - had indeed captured a single mouse.

"Without remote monitoring, it would have been another month before we checked for activity in the trap," says McCoy. "It is proving to be a very useful tool for us to have in our rodent management tool box."

McCoy adds that while the rodent catch history for the facility is very low – five captures over a seven year period – it only takes a single rodent (or pest) sighting by an auditor or inspector to lead to a points deduction or audit failure.

Fast Facts

Where: Small food processing (confectionary and cheese manufacturing) plant with wet production, and zero-degree and traditional storage areas.

When: The trial program started in November 2016 and transitioned to all remote monitoring a year later.

Total Number of Devices Deployed: 77 – mainly in storage areas of the facility.

Rodent Pressure: Low - only a handful of captures over the last five years.

Service Frequency (before remote monitoring): Weekly

Service Frequency (after remote monitoring was installed): Monthly

Average Service Time (before): 1 hour 24 minutes

Average Service Time (after): 54 minutes

Benefits:

- Technician has more time for inspections and providing solutions during service visits.
- The system is audit compliant.
- The system has the ability the generate trend data including trap movements, captures, system testing and servicing.

While Wil-Kil is not able to respond to every call within the hour (the plant has a 24 hour response time in its contract), remote monitoring does accelerate the process of identifying root causes or conducive conditions and what, if any, corrective actions are needed to eliminate and prevent the problem from happening again.

Another viewpoint McCoy took into account was the technician tasked with servicing the facility. Technicians, who are known to be brutally honest in their assessment of new technology, are a key factor in making remote monitoring or any pest management program exceed client expectations.

McCoy says the technician assigned to the facility was happy to not have to bend down 77 times to check traps that almost never had activity. It also gave the technician the freedom to spend time doing what he does best – being an investigator and solution provider for pest issues.

The Client Experience

The client experience is critical to the success of any pest management program. Throughout the process, McCoy met with the client to gauge their confidence in the system and ensure it met their expectations and requirements.

The system can also be set up to deliver capture alerts via text or email on a daily, weekly or monthly basis (this client receives daily reports). There is also an online portal where the client can log in to view an up-to-the-minute graphic map feature of deployed devices, system status reports and automated trend lines.

"The client is very confident with the system and likes the fact that we can respond to any captures within a short period of time," says McCoy. "They like the transparency the system provides and the fact it makes them audit ready."

The Future of Remote Monitoring

As remote monitoring technology becomes more common place in commercial facilities, clients and pest management professionals need to set realistic expectations and avoid overpromising or getting away from the fundamentals of their existing program.

"Remote monitoring on its own is not the silver bullet of rodent management," says McCoy. "It is an early detection tool that can serve as a 24/7 watchdog in a facility, providing another set of eyes and ears for rodent activity."

"We need to listen to clients, identify their concerns and account for the unique circumstances and needs of their facility," says McCoy. "Each situation and service contract is different but remote monitoring is changing the mentality on how rodent management is performed. And, our clients will be the beneficiaries of that."

McCoy says technicians need to continue to be vigilant in their inspection and assessment practices, and regularly use pest trend data from remote monitors and other sources in their decision making process.

With more frequent inspections and audits, zero tolerance, regular "swabathons" looking for harmful pathogens, and the threat of product recalls, QA and facility managers are looking to new technology for more options. They are also looking to demonstrate to second- and third-party auditors that remote monitoring technology is a tool that supports their facility's food safety efforts.

"Auditors want proof of success when it comes to rodent management programs and the reasoning behind using remote monitoring," says McCoy. "The data gleaned from remote monitoring will help us accomplish that."

McCoy adds that pest management professionals need to continue to provide the expertise they are uniquely qualified to deliver and build rodent management programs tailored to clients' specific requirements.