

# 2020 State of the Flea Market



Market Remains Steady



COVID-19 & Flea Control



Flea Control Program Service Protocols



The Danger in DIY



Making Customers Part of the Solution



Exclusive Market Research



Sponsored By



# small but Mighty

With so many Americans working from home, some PMPs expect an upswing in flea control business.



→ **P**est control operators typically look to the weather when predicting what flea season might look like in their markets. But this year, other conditions may enter into that forecast as well — namely, the changing household dynamics resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. As more people work from home, their changing behaviors may have an impact.

“Dogs whose owners are home all day are probably spending more time outside

now,” says Jeff King of The Pest Rangers in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. “Traditionally, people have let their dogs out once before they go to work and then again when they get home, but now many have the ability to put them out more frequently. That means more opportunities for their pets to pick up fleas and bring them into the house.”

According to the PCT 2020 State of the Flea Market report, about a fifth of PMPs, 21 percent, expect to see a flea outbreak due to COVID-19 closures; another 42

percent are unsure about the effect the stay-at-home lifestyle will have on their business. Fortunately, only 11 percent expect the pandemic to have a significant negative impact on their businesses.

## Weather Continues to Play a Leading Role

In some markets, the weather will help increase flea pressure, as these pests tend to flourish in the kind of hot, humid weather much of the nation will experience this summer. King says he expects



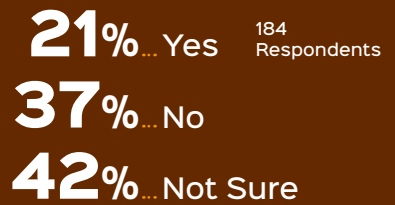
to see the heaviest activity beginning in early August in Pennsylvania; Conrad Carpenter of Exterm-Tek Pest Control in Charleston, W.Va., said in June that fleas had made an early appearance there. “It has been extremely wet here this spring, so termite pressure is crazy; we expect to see similar activity levels with fleas,” he said. On the other side of the spectrum, Keith Birkemeyer of ProBest Pest Management says he never encounters fleas in his market due to the super low humidity of Phoenix.

Meanwhile, many markets in the southern and southeastern states see flea infestations year-round, or nearly year-round. “Our flea work has been a little slower than normal this spring, but we expect it to pick up as the rainy part

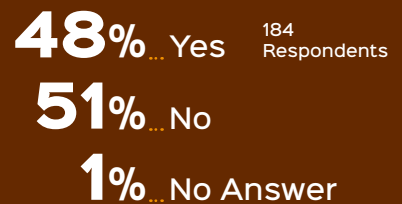
of the season (approaches),” says Wade Wilson of Turner Pest Control in Jacksonville, Fla. “Aside from January and February, when we get some freezing temperatures, we generally see steady demand throughout the year. We expect it to pick up now through fall.”

In his Southern Oklahoma market, Chad Highley, ACE, of Environmental Pest Control is seeing a surge of fleas. “Since about mid-May, we’ve seen a real uptick in the number of flea infestations — some of them intense,” he says. “We get one or two calls over the winter, then all of a sudden, like someone flipped a switch, calls start pouring in. In this market, that’s in large part because of rodent populations. When the rodents start moving, our flea business explodes.” ●

## Do you expect a flea outbreak due to COVID-19 closures?

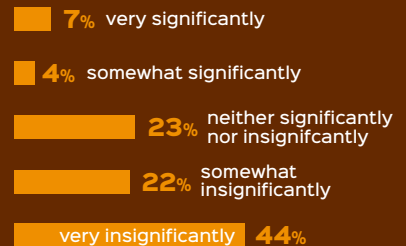


## Are homeowners hesitating to allow indoor treatments?



## How much has your location’s flea control business been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?

184 Respondents



## What are the primary reasons your business has been negatively affected by COVID-19?



19 Respondents; Respondents are those who indicated a negative response to the question above.

Source for all charts: Readex Research

# A Steady Flow of Business Opportunity

Offering flea service allows PMPs to hang onto customers who need the service and can help attract new customers as well.

While flea control services may not represent a large percentage of overall sales for most pest management companies — PMPs tell us it represents, on average, 4.6 percent of their revenues — it's good, steady business that gives you another way to delight your established customers or to get a foot in the door with new ones. It's a service nearly all PMPs provide.

"Flea work can be time-consuming, but it's no more difficult than general pest work," says Kevin Mills of Mills Pest Management in Burbank, Calif. "We choose to do it because we don't want to give customers any reason to go to another company. If we're servicing for another pest and they say, 'We have a flea problem,' I want to be able to help them with that."

Wade Wilson of Turner Pest Control says it's important to remember the public's health, too. "Our top priority is taking care of the health concerns of our customers and communities," he says. "Fleas can pose a threat to kids and pets, especially in the form of secondary bacterial infections; we want to help protect them from any adverse effects."

Most PMPs — 90 percent — expect the percentage of revenue they generate from fleas to hold steady or increase in 2020. Any revenue hikes are

**92%**  
of pest management companies offer flea control services

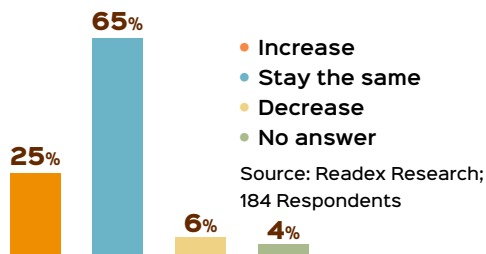
**82%**  
offer flea control as a separate service

**76%**  
provide a flea control guarantee

Source for all data: Readex Research

## Optimism Remains High

Compared with 2019, PMPs expect the percentage of revenue generated by flea control services in 2020 to:



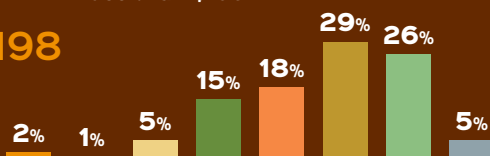
likely to be the result of increased volume rather than increased prices, as the average cost of a residential flea service is just \$3 higher than last year: \$198 in 2020 versus \$195 in 2019. ●

## How much do you charge?

What PMPs charge for a typical residential flea control service.

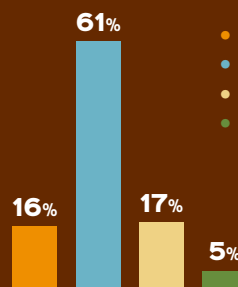
- \$500 or more
- \$400-\$499
- \$300-\$399
- \$250-\$299
- \$200-\$249
- \$150-\$199
- \$100-\$149
- Less than \$100

**AVG: \$198**



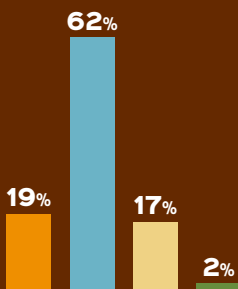
## Over the past three years, the percent of revenue generated by flea control services has:

- Increased
- Stayed the same
- Decreased
- Not involved 3 years ago





### Over the past year, flea infestations in my market have:



- Increased
- Stayed the same
- Decreased
- Not involved a year ago

All Charts: Source: Readex Research; 184 Respondents

### About the Survey

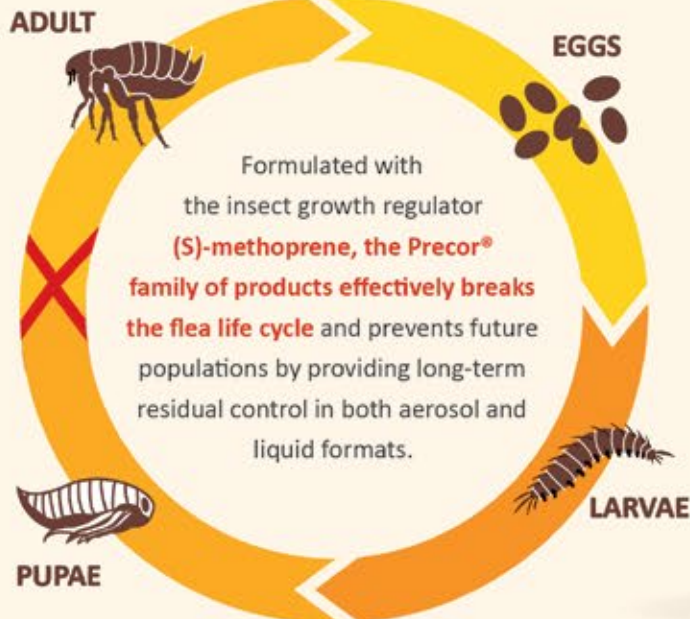
The PCT 2020 State of the Flea Market survey was sponsored by Zoëcon and compiled by Readex Research, a privately held research firm in Stillwater, Minn.

A sample of 4,472 pest control company owners, operators, executives and technical directors was systematically selected from the PCT database. Data was collected from 201 respondents – a 4 percent response rate – via online survey from May 26-June 4, 2020. The margin of error for percentages based on the 184 respondents whose location offers flea control services is plus or minus 7.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. Charts may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

# THE KEY TO FLEA-FREE HOMES

The pest control industry has always played an essential role in the protection of public health. So much so that professional pest control was recognized as an essential service by the United States Department of Homeland Security during stay-at-home orders, allowing the industry to continue its role in protecting health and homes from unwanted pests. As PMPs continue to provide their crucial services, they will need to take precautions to protect themselves and their clients this summer.

With many PMPs experiencing an increase in flea activity this summer due to people and pets spending more time outdoors in parks and backyards, plus historically high pet adoption levels, PMPs should consider treating homes with products that feature the active ingredient (S)-methoprene. This insect growth regulator (IGR) penetrates and migrates deep into places like the base of carpet fibers and between furniture cushions to prevent pre-adult fleas from maturing into breeding, biting adults. IGRs also feature up to seven months of control against future flea infestations, allowing PMPs to reduce callbacks and avoid multiple home visits.



## SOLUTIONS FOR EXTENDED RESIDUAL FLEA CONTROL

The Precor® product line from Zoëcon offers solutions to rid homes of the fleas you can see and those you can't.



 **CENTRAL** Life Sciences®

Petcor, Precor and Zoëcon with design are registered trademarks of Wellmark International. Central Life Sciences with design is a registered trademark of Central Garden & Pet Company. ©2020 Wellmark International.





The outcome of any treatment can be dependent upon the pre-treatment work homeowners do before and after flea products are applied. For the most effective and efficient flea treatment, remind homeowners to follow these helpful steps both **before** and **after** product application for lasting results:

## BEFORE THE TREATMENT

1. Vacuum all rugs, carpets and furniture – especially between and under cushions. Then, tightly seal and dispose of the vacuum bag outside.
2. Clear and clean all floors, even closets. Mop all tile and vinyl floors. Sweep all concrete floors.
3. Remove all decorative items such as pillows and blankets. Be sure to check for items under beds and furniture.
4. Remove all pets and pet accessories, including pet food and water dishes. Fish bowls and aquariums may remain if properly covered and the air pump is shut off during treatment.
5. Wash or dispose of all pet bedding. If laundering, wash pet bedding separately from other linens.
6. Show your pest control professional where your pets sleep, rest and eat.

## AFTER THE TREATMENT

1. Wait for the specific instructions from your control professional to find out when it is safe to return home.
2. Wait to resume normal vacuuming 24 hours after a home has been treated to give the insecticide time to work.
3. Continue vacuuming for 2-3 weeks at intervals of 3-4 days. The vacuum's mechanical pressure will improve the effectiveness of the insecticide by stimulating unhatched fleas to emerge from their protective pupae cases.
4. Expect to see some adult fleas for up to 3 weeks after treatment. Flea pupae are protected from insecticides by their cocoons. They will continue to emerge over a period of 1-3 weeks. Once exposed to the insecticide residual, they will be eliminated.



*Learn how to make  
fleas disappear with just  
one treatment with our  
Flea Treatment Brochure  
at [Zoecon.com](http://Zoecon.com).*





# Getting the Treatment Right

IGRs remain the go-to product for PMPs working at flea accounts.

When asked about treatment protocols, PMPs almost universally say they incorporate an insect growth regulator (IGR) to disrupt the life cycle. Ninety-two percent of PMPs reported including an IGR in their service protocol, and 85 percent said that their primary treatment regimen for controlling fleas is a combination of general-use insecticides and IGRs.

“A big part of treating fleas successfully is combining a good adulticide labeled for fleas with an IGR labeled for the species you’re dealing with,” says Chad Highley, ACE, of Environmental Pest Control. He treats cat, dog and sand

fleas — the three primary species named by respondents to the PCT survey.

Although he treats indoors and outdoors at every account, Highley says that knowing the specifics of where to treat means first identifying the source. “Until you determine where the fleas are coming from, you can treat all you want but you won’t resolve the issue,” he says. “We generally find that fleas are carried into yards and homes by wildlife — a transient rodent population or a raccoon harboring in the crawlspace or attic. Because of this, our flea inspections often result in discussions with the customer about the need for exclusion work.”

Kevin Mills of Mills Pest Management

has similar experiences. “You always need to look at the bigger picture; you can’t assume that it’s ‘just fleas.’ If you do that, you may miss the rodent infestation that’s the true culprit,” he says. “During inspection, you need to be diligent about checking the attic and crawlspace in addition to the usual flea hiding places.”

In the house, those places may include carpets and rugs, upholstered furniture, pet bedding, draperies, floor cracks and tile joints. “It’s important to treat under baseboards,” says Wade Wilson of Turner Pest Control. “That’s an area a lot of technicians miss, but it’s important because fleas like to harbor and will lay eggs there.” ●



## Bug Bombs: The Danger in DIY

Building customer relationships means educating them about wise pest control tactics and the safest products. Unfortunately, sometimes that education comes after the customer has tried a risky practice in their home. With flea infestations, that usually means they've used bug bombs, also known as total release foggers.

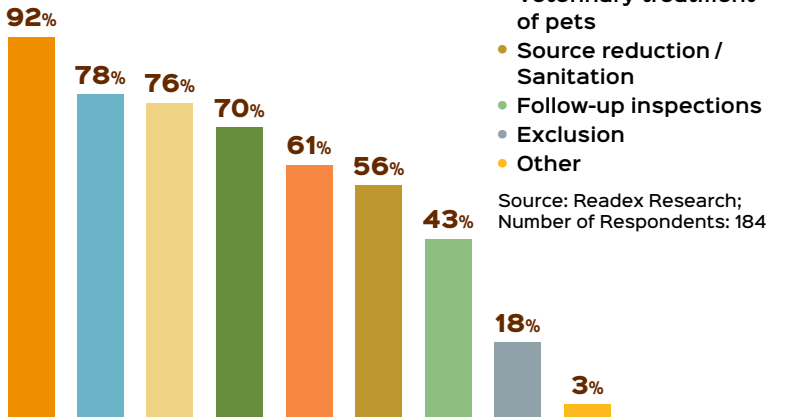
"Many times, people call us for their flea problem after they've already failed with a bug bomb," says Kathy Daw of Bob's Pest Control, El Paso, Texas. "Of course, these aren't effective at all against fleas. Even worse, they can be dangerous. People don't think about the harm they're doing to their pets and themselves, and if they use them around pilots — by a gas appliance or water heater, for example — they can blow up the place. I tell them as patiently as I can that these just aren't a good solution no matter how you look at it."

Conrad Carpenter of Exterm-Tek Pest Control says it's the low cost of bug bombs that appeals to his clientele. "We discourage them, explaining that they are dangerous and kill on contact only, and that they are not going to solve the problem, but they try them anyway. Then they call us to say, 'We should have listened. We need you to come out.'"

"People want to feel empowered, and so they go the DIY route. Thanks to social media and other types of marketing, they think they can spend \$10 on a bug bomb and get the same results they'd get by calling us for a professional service. Of course bug bombs are ineffective, particularly on fleas," says Chad Highley, ACE, of Environmental Pest Control. "As an industry, we need to keep educating customers so they make safe and effective decisions about their pest control."

### Flea Control Service Protocols

What service protocols are included in PMPs' flea programs? (Respondents could select more than one answer.)



- IGRs
- Outdoor treatments
- General-use insecticides
- Vacuuming (prep)
- Veterinary treatment of pets
- Source reduction / Sanitation
- Follow-up inspections
- Exclusion
- Other

Source: Readex Research; Number of Respondents: 184

### How Much Time Do You Spend?

How much time an average technician spends on a typical residential flea control service:

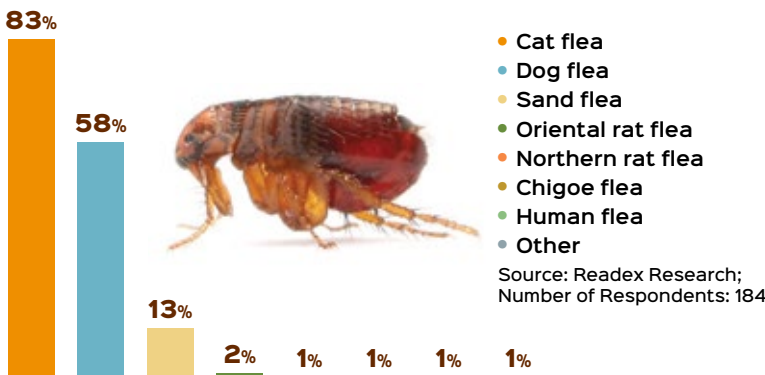


- 2 hours or more
- 1 - 2 hours
- 1/2 - 1 hour
- 1/4 - 1/2 hour
- Less than 15 minutes

Source: Readex Research; Number of Respondents: 182

### Common Flea Species

(Respondents could select more than one answer.)



- Cat flea
- Dog flea
- Sand flea
- Oriental rat flea
- Northern rat flea
- Chigoe flea
- Human flea
- Other

Source: Readex Research; Number of Respondents: 184



# Making Customers Part of the Solution

**Educating the customer means explaining the service, sharing expectations and asking for their help.**

Aside from knowing they don't want them in their homes, customers tend not to know much about fleas. It becomes the pest management company's job to get them up to speed because, yes, you really do need their cooperation to eradicate these pests.

"Many times, people don't know the difference between ticks and fleas until their vet or one of our technicians identifies the pest," says Kathy Daw of Bob's Pest Control in El Paso, Texas. Fleas are sometimes mistaken for bed bugs, too, due to their propensity to take a bite out of any warm-blooded being they happen to latch onto.

These cases of mistaken identity are particularly common among customers without pets. They don't make the flea connection, because they don't realize fleas can get into their homes a number of ways. Maybe they have a rodent issue, or a flea-infested opossum gets into the crawlspace. "Sometimes it's as easy as having a neighbor who keeps their pet along the property line," says Conrad Carpenter of Exterm-Tek Pest Control.

## The Customer's Role

Educating the customer means not only explaining to them what the service entails but also sharing expectations as to what they are accountable for. Many PMPs — 52 percent, according to our study — provide leave-behind sheets with specific instructions. Some email a prep sheet prior to the visit and then leave the follow-up sheet for actions to take once the service has been completed.

“Since we started making customers sign a prep sheet with complete instructions, our callback rate has declined significantly,” says Jeff King of The Pest Rangers. “Now any calls we get from flea control customers are usually just questions rather than service requests.”

What should customers be ready to do?

## Take Their Pet to the Vet

Eradicating fleas means treating the environment and the pet, if a pet is involved. Many PMPs suggest the homeowner take their pet to the veterinarian or groomer during the time technicians are treating the home.

“Customers need to understand that they should not just slap any cheap flea collar on their pet. I always, always, always recommend they see their vet — not a groomer but an actual vet — to find out what kind of treatment their pet needs and what will be safest for them,” says Daw. “I explain that we all need to work together, and that without the vet, we will be fighting a battle we won't win.”

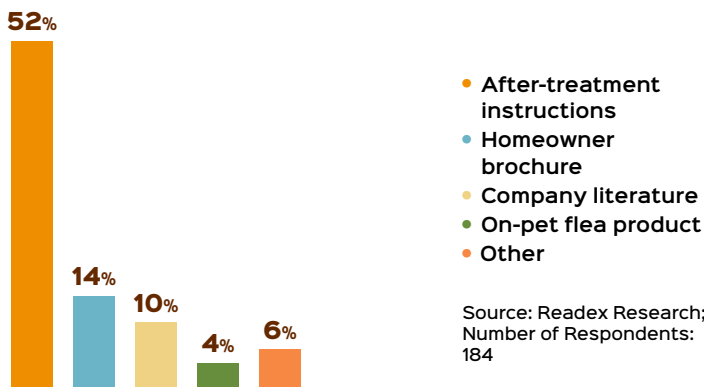
## Prepare Their Home for Treatment

Vacuuming is perhaps the most important thing the customer can do to ensure the success of flea treatments. “Vacuuming several times a day for several days before applying the chemical is essential to remove eggs, larvae and feces, and to stimulate flea pupae to emerge from the cocoon so they can be exposed to the pesticide,” Lance Driessen of Best Pest Solutions in Plover, Wis., shares in his “Before Treating” customer instruction sheet. He also instructs customers to vacuum rugs, drapes, upholstered furniture, mattresses and cushions, and to seal and discard the vacuum bag after cleaning. Vacuuming after treatment is important, too, Driessen adds, instructing his customers to vacuum every day for 10 days following application.

Additionally, homeowners need to wash pet bedding and clear their bowls and toys, as well as any other items on the floor. Hardwood and tile floors should be mopped, and floor vents can be cleaned with a wet, soapy sponge. They also need to cover any aquariums and turn off the filter if possible (not recommended

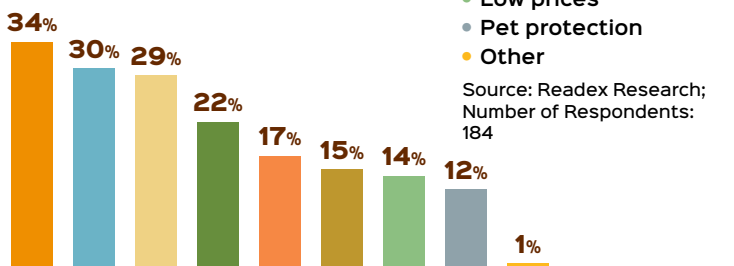
## Leave-Behinds for Flea (and Other Pest) Customers

What leave-behinds do your technicians provide to customers?



## What PMPs Tout in Flea Control Marketing

Just over half, 54 percent, of PMPs said they include flea control services in their marketing materials. These respondents reported featuring the following benefits:



for saltwater fish). Some PMPs also request that the homeowner mows the lawn, so that the outdoor application can get closer to the soil.

## Be Patient

Patience begins with customers understanding that they need to leave the house (with any pets) until the pesticide dries. But patience is also needed after treatment, since pupae will continue to develop and emerge from their cocoons for several days or weeks.

More than two-thirds of PMPs — 69 percent — said they always discuss the benefits of using an IGR with their customers; another 21 percent said they sometimes discuss these benefits. “When I tell clients we use birth control in addition to the pesticide, it's kind of a wow factor for them,” says Carpenter. “They appreciate we use a multi-tiered approach to give them the best results possible.”

A natural part of this conversation should be explaining the life cycle of fleas and setting customer expectations about what a normal amount of post-treatment activity looks like versus when they need to call you back. ●



# DING DONG THE ITCH IS DEAD.

CONTROL FLEAS CONFIDENTLY BY PREVENTING FUTURE POPULATIONS WITH THE IGR IN PRECOR® PRODUCTS.



COMPARISON CHART	(S)-METHOPRENE (PRECOR®)	PYRIPROXYFEN
• The original/first insect growth regulator (IGR)	✓	
• Heavier-than-air molecule penetrates deep into carpets and upholstery where flea larvae develop	✓	
• IGR utilized in leading vet dispensed topically applied flea control treatments for dogs and cats	✓	
• Protects stored grain products from insect infestations	✓	
• Market leading government agency IGR for mosquito control larvicides*	✓	
• Prevents flea emergence for up to seven months	✓	✓
• Low odor and non-repellent	✓	✓



A LEGACY OF CONTROL.



Precor and Zoecon with design are registered trademarks of Wellmark International. ©2019 Wellmark International. \*Data on file.

Go to [ZOECON.com](http://ZOECON.com) for the full story