



# Issue Fact Sheet

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## Bed Bugs

### Background

A long-forgotten household pest, the common bed bug (*Cimex lectularius*) has re-emerged to headlines around the country. The quaint name reflects the close association that these insects have to their host; however, it by no means delineates the habitat of the pest. The bug has been found to infest all property types from offices and theaters to stores and schools. It seems that wherever there are people, there are likely to be bed bugs, ready to hitch a ride on clothing or packages to be deposited in an environment where they have easy access to human hosts.

The pest was largely eliminated in the United States when the pesticide DDT was used freely for indoor and agricultural purposes. In 1972, however, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) banned the sale of the chemical because of its demonstrated toxic effects on a variety of animals, including humans.

While inspection and active monitoring for the presence of bed bugs is the basis of the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programs recommended by EPA and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), property owners are challenged in their efforts to eradicate infestations because there are few effective pesticides; bed bugs have even developed resistance to DDT. While certain existing chemicals will kill adults that are directly sprayed, there are no chemicals that effectively address other life stages of the bug or provide an effective residual level of the chemical on sprayed surfaces.

In comments made before the Congressional Forum on Bed Bugs, Dr. Michael Potter of the University of Kentucky stated no chemical solution for bed bugs will be available in the near term because it takes roughly 10 years to bring a new chemical to market and costs approximately \$200 million in research and testing. Furthermore, because the market share for residential pesticides used indoors is exceedingly small compared to that of other pesticide products, such as those used in agriculture, it will not be a high priority for chemical companies.

### NMHC/NAA Position

Congress should implement a “Manhattan Project” to expedite the development of a safe and effective “next generation” pesticide to control bed bug infestations. The federal government should use its national laboratory system to expedite testing of existing pesticide products for their safety and efficacy in treating bed bug infestations. HUD should develop financial assistance mechanism to help owners defray the potentially unsustainable costs associated the certain catastrophic infestations. HUD should also develop, on an expedited basis, an education guide for residents to heighten their awareness of beg bugs and the importance of complying with a property’s IPM program.

### Current Status

Comprehensive bed bug legislation has been introduced in the House by Rep. Jan Schmidt (R-OH). The measure (H.R. 967) directs the Department of Agriculture to: (1) award grants to support research studies on bed bug management and eradication; (2) appoint a bed bug task force that includes representatives of the pest management industry, multifamily and hospitality industries as well as public health professionals; and (3) award grants for related research projects

As advocated by NMHC/NAA, it addresses the problem of ineffective and possibly dangerous bed bug treatments being marketed to the public by requiring manufacturers who label pesticides as controlling a public health pest to submit data proving the product’s efficacy. It would prohibit the sale of products that fail to prove their claims. The measure directs the Agriculture Department to coordinate with the EPA to expedite approval of pesticides identified through the research grants that the bill funds. It also funds demonstration projects for certain housing authorities to supplement ongoing bed bug prevention and mitigation activities.

## **Relevant Committees**

House Appropriations Committee  
House Agriculture Committee  
House Financial Services

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Senate Agriculture Committee  
Senate Banking

## **NMHC/NAA Contact Information**

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