



# BED BUGS

## Information for Multifamily Property Owners and Managers



### **BED BUGS – THEY'RE BACK!**

#### **A Brief History**

Though prevalent throughout the United States prior to World War II, bed bugs became virtually non-existent here and in other industrialized nations during the latter half of the Twentieth Century. This was due to eradication efforts which relied primarily upon treating spaces infested by bed bugs with highly-effective and lethal insecticides, the most notable of which being DDT.

While bed bugs continued to maintain a significant presence in other parts of the world—including Asian, African and Eastern European Countries—it would take nearly 50 years for generations of Americans to come to the realization that the bugs, being more than fictitious pests of nursery rhyme lore, actually exist.

Although DDT was banned for a number of health and safety-related issues in the U.S. in 1972, it wasn't until the late 1990's, with the onset of globalization and a corresponding surge in international travel and trade, that bed bugs began to reemerge throughout the country.

Since their resurgence, public health officials, entomologists, or insect scientists, and pest management professionals (PMP) in all 50 states have reported dramatic increases in the number of bed bug infestations they're alerted to annually. In fact, from 2004 to 2008, the percentage of U.S. PMPs who fielded bed bug-related calls—according to Mendham, New Jersey-based SPC Research—increased 22 percent to 60 percent.

The current lack of legal insecticides as powerful and effective at killing bed bugs as DDT, as well as studies that point to a certain level of resistance among bed bugs to legal pesticides, gives some insight into the challenges associated with combating the insect's revival and proliferation.



## Portrait of a Bed Bug

Capable of reaching the size of an apple seed at

full growth, bed bugs are distinguishable by their reddish-brown color, although after feeding on the blood of humans and warm-blooded animals—their sole food source—the bugs assume a distinctly bright, blood-red hue until digestion is complete.

In addition, bed bugs, with a typical lifespan of 6 to 12 months, are wingless, flat, broadly oval-shaped insects, which feed by painlessly penetrating the skin of their hosts. In fact, adult bed bugs have been known to survive on a single blood meal for up to a year.

Female bed bugs typically lay 1-5 eggs per day, and produce hundreds of offspring during their short lifespan.



## Bed Bugs: Savvy Travelers

Bed bugs prefer the indoors and are

most often discovered in high-traffic spaces frequented by humans, such as hotels, office buildings, dormitories and apartment communities. Reports of bed bug infestations in train cars, ships, airplanes and buses have also surfaced in recent years. And, because bed bugs are inclined to seek sanctuary in areas prone to crowd and clutter, the insides of suitcases, purses and backpacks provide for them ideal hiding spaces.

Their ability to attach themselves to and lay eggs on and in just about everything from luggage, clothing and shoes, to books—yes, books—and household furniture, which is often recycled several times over the course its usable lifespan, has paved the way for bed bugs to travel undetected from far reaches of the world to cities and states across the country in just a few short years.

## Signs to Help Property Owners, Managers, Staff and Residents Identify Bed Bugs

Now that you know what they look like, it's important that you familiarize yourself with characteristics inherent among bed bugs.

The following bullet points provide a summary of several key indicators to help you identify bed bugs and determine whether your property is indeed playing host to them:

- True to their name, studies indicate that in nearly 60 percent of cases, bed bugs are found to take refuge in and/or near mattresses and box springs. Bed bugs have also been known to loiter in, around and between walls and carpeting, bed frames, base boards, dressers, upholstered furniture, window sills, wall hangings, wallpaper seams, crown moldings and even inside electronic devices, such as alarm clocks, televisions and smoke detectors.

- Because bed bugs leave some persons with itchy welts strikingly similar to those caused by fleas and mosquitoes, the origination of such markings can often go misdiagnosed. This is due especially to the fact that bed bugs typically feed at night, while their hosts are sleeping, which further hampers a person's ability to attribute the origination of their symptoms and discomfort to bed bugs. However, welts caused by bed bugs often times appear in succession and on exposed areas of the skin, such as the face, neck and arms. In some cases, an individual may not experience any visible reaction resulting from direct contact with bed bugs.

- While bed bugs typically prefer to act at night, they often times do not succeed in returning to their hiding spots without leaving behind some visible sign of their presence. Aside from the itchy red welts visible on some individuals, bed bugs often leave traces of their presence through fecal markings of a red to dark brown color, on or near beds. Evidence of blood stains generally appear when the bugs have been squashed, usually by an unsuspecting host in their sleep. And, because they shed, it's not uncommon for bed bugs to leave behind skin casts in areas where they typically frequent.

- Sweet, musty and sometimes offensive odors are commonly reported to linger in areas severely infested with bed bugs.

### Checking the following items and areas in and around units can help you determine whether or not your property is playing host to bed bugs:

- Bedding
- Bed Frames
- Mattress Seams
- Upholstered Furniture, especially under cushions and along seams
- Around, behind and under wood furniture, especially along areas where drawers slide
- Curtains and draperies
- Along window and door frames
- Ceiling and wall junctions
- Crown moldings
- Behind and around wall hangings and loose wallpaper
- Between carpeting and walls (carpet can be pulled away from the wall and tack strip)
- Cracks and crevices in walls and floors
- Inside electronic devices, such as smoke and carbon monoxide detectors

# Bed Bugs: Separating Bed Bug Fact From Fiction—Three Popular Myths Debunked

In order for multifamily property owners, managers, staff and residents to have a clear understanding of the enemy they collectively face in bed bugs, it's essential that bed bug fact be separated from fiction. Armed with the right information, the joint vigilance of each of these stakeholders can go a long way toward helping to ensure that a single-unit bed bug incidence doesn't turn in to a full-blown, property-wide infestation.

## So, true or false:

### 1. *Bed bugs are typically found to inhabit and thrive in residences of persons with poor hygiene.*

FALSE - Experts agree that one of the main factors behind bed bugs' recent and alarming resurgence in cities and states across the country is increased global travel and trade. It's no wonder then that bed bugs have been found time and time again to have taken up residence in some of the swankiest hotels and apartment buildings in some of the nation's ritziest neighborhoods.

Nonetheless, stigmas stemming from the association of bed bugs with poor hygiene and uncleanliness have caused apartment residents, out of shame, to avoid notifying property owners and managers of bed bugs' presence; this serves only to enable their proliferation. While bed bugs are, by their very nature, more attracted to clutter, they're certainly not deterred by cleanliness. After all, they're really only after one thing: blood.

Bottom line: bed bugs know no socioeconomic bounds; claims to the contrary are patently false.

### 2. *Bed Bugs transmit disease.*

FALSE - There exists no scientific evidence to suggest that bed bugs are vectors for disease. In fact, federal agencies tasked with addressing pests of public health concern, namely the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, have refused to elevate bed bugs to the threat level posed by disease-carrying pests.

Again, stigmas associating bed bugs with disease are ill-founded.

### 3. *Most over-the-counter insecticides and pesticides are effective at eradicating bed bugs.*

FALSE - Due in large part to their ability and inclination to hide in the most unreachable of places, such as drywall cracks and household electronics, most over-the-counter pesticides and insecticides are ineffective at treating bed bug infestations.

In fact, entomologists, or insect scientists, have reported that bed bugs in certain regions of the country, particularly in

New York City, have shown to be outright resistant to certain forms of otherwise highly-effective pesticides that attack the bug's nervous system. Still, other insecticides and pesticides meant for digestion are completely useless at treating bed bug infestations. Remember, bed bugs feed only on the blood of warm-blooded humans and animals.

Multifamily housing residents and maintenance staff should be discouraged from attempting to remedy bed bug infestations through the use of over-the-counter chemicals, pesticides and insecticides intended to treat cockroaches, rodents, ants and termites.

## Tips to Prevent Bed Bug Infestations

### Encourage Residents to Avoid Bringing Used Furniture from Unknown Sources into Their Apartments

Countless bed bug infestations have stemmed directly from the introduction into a resident's unit of second-hand and abandoned furniture. Unless the determination can be made with absolute certainty that a piece of second-hand furniture is bed bug-free, residents should assume that one reason a seemingly nice looking leather couch, for example, is sitting curbside, waiting to be hauled off to the landfill, may very well be due to the fact that it's teeming with bed bugs.

Owners and managers may want to consider placing restrictions upon the types of furniture residents are permitted to bring into their units.

### Promptly Address Bed Bug Sightings

Property owners and managers should promptly respond to resident bed bug notifications by inspecting units suspected of hosting bed bugs. Units above, next to and below those where bed bugs have been identified should also be inspected.

Moving to quickly execute the eradication of bed bugs in one unit severely lessens the risk of a community-wide infestation.

### Retain Professional Pest Management Specialists to Conduct Bed Bug Eradication

As discussed above, the vast majority of over-the-counter pesticides and insecticides used to treat traditional household pests such as cockroaches, rodents, ants and termites are often no match for bed bugs.

Upon discovery that bed bugs are indeed present in a unit, property owners and managers are encouraged to contact a professional pest management specialist with experience in bed bug eradication.

### There are several methods pest management professionals use to eradicate bed bugs, including:

- Extreme heating (baking) and chilling treatments
- Commercial Insecticides/Pesticides
- Alcohol-Based Pesticides
- Gas Fumigants
- Steam

## Treating Bed Bug Infestations

Property owners and managers are encouraged to retain the services of a pest management professional experienced in treating bed bug infestations.

Multifamily housing owners and managers should make every attempt possible to notify and inform residents of eradication protocol. Doing so will enable them to make preparations necessary to ensure that the treatment process is executed as seamlessly as possible.

Likewise, residents must comply with bed bug eradication protocol set forth both by property owners and managers, as well as the pest management company charged with carrying out the eradication procedure.

Keep in mind that it is often the case that several treatments may be necessary to completely eradicate bed bugs.

### **The following requirements are common among typical bed bug eradication protocols:**

- Move all furniture 3 feet from walls in all rooms.
- Remove from unit all personal/sensitive items (e.g. clothes, toys, plants, etc.), leaving furniture.
- Place all clothing, linens and other personal effects, which are to be treated separately, into plastic bags. Such items should be cleaned/washed, dried or heat treated at 130 Degrees Fahrenheit for 1 hour, or fumigated, before returning to the treated unit.
- Remove from mattresses bed coverings, blankets, comforters, sheets, etc. and clean/wash according to above instructions for treating clothing and personal effects.
- Remove from furniture blankets, linens, pillows, etc. and clean/wash according to above instructions for treating clothing, personal effects and bedding.
- If possible, wrap in plastic and discard bed bug infested mattresses and box springs, or place infested mattress in bed encasement prior to treatment according to above instructions for clothing, personal effects and bedding.
- Wrap infested mattresses, box springs and furniture in plastic before removing from the unit so as to prevent the inadvertent spread of bed bugs to other units and areas of the community. Once removed from the building, destroy infested items and have hauled away from the property immediately.
- Unplug all electronics.
- Vacuum all surfaces (e.g. floors, carpets, upholstered furniture, etc.).
- Vacate the unit prior to the arrival of the pest management professional; plan to return no sooner than four hours following treatment.

By working together, multifamily housing residents, owners and managers can successfully prevent bed bug infestations.

## Who Bears the Cost of Bed Bug Eradication?

Treating bed bug infestations can be extremely expensive, running anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars per unit. The current lack of legal parameters nationwide regarding responsibility for bearing costs associated with bed bug eradication has left the issue largely to the courts to decide – clearly not the ideal venue for owners, managers and residents of multifamily communities to settle such matters.

In jurisdictions where there exists no law concerning the issue of bed bug eradication, property owners and managers do have the option to address bed bug-related matters through their lease and incorporated community rules. Doing so will clearly define which party is obligated to pay for bed bug eradication costs, as well as the resident's responsibility to comply with eradication protocol.

NAA's National Lease Program staff is available to assist property owner and manager members craft and incorporate bed bug-related language into their lease.

