



Unseen Enemies

Keeping Ahead of Pests, Bugs and Other Nasties

by Chris McBeath

In an industry where cleanliness is next to Godliness, bugs are a pesky thing to write about. Even among peers, hotels and restaurants shy away from having their names associated with such things verbally, let alone in writing. Yet if the truth be known, they all have bugs to some degree or another and the perpetual question is: What to do with them?



After all, through the millennia cockroaches have proven themselves to be the hardest of nasties, and while current pest management programs keep these under control, that's not always the case for bed bugs. Remember New York a few years ago? Bed bugs scourged the headlines with their travels across multiple-star hotel beds. Their growing omnipresence is the Number One potential nightmare for all hoteliers and, according to TripAdvisor, a prevalent concern for 80% of all travellers.

"There are lots of theories as to why bed bugs are making a comeback and one of the most logical is because of the significant changes made in exterminating cockroaches," says Sean Rollo, an entomologist and Vice President, Structural Pest Management Association of BC. "Ten years ago, we

used a liquid pesticide, which had a residual effect that also staved off bed bugs and other insects. Today, we use a gel bait that roaches eat and take back to their nesting space. Hence, there is no longer any secondary or tertiary impact on other pests."

Rollo goes on to note a second major change - where pest management used to be done as part of a regular maintenance program, now (in Canada at least) it can only be done where there is physical evidence of an infestation. "It's certainly a more responsible, targeted approach, but it's only been really successful with cockroaches, and to a lesser degree ants and termites. The industry has yet to develop a similar approach to bed bugs."

Have Case, Will Travel

These resilient pests are great travellers, too. Although bedbugs don't fly, they hitch rides via guests' belongings, often as eggs or small nymphs that later develop into adult insects. When you consider that females lay hundreds of hard-to-see eggs and immature nymphs can hatch in less than a week, molt and complete a life cycle within 6 weeks, it's easy to see how bugs can become well established before anyone notices. Ease of international travel only exacerbates their mobility, especially since bedbugs can live for a year or more without food.

Always Bet on the Bug

This insider's mantra sums up why vermin management is a thriving business, with constant challenges of an ever-smarter, ever-evolving pest. Pest management isn't a do-it-yourself project. Professional Integrated Pest Management (IPM) comprises six key concepts:

- Never underestimate the bug – get professional advice
- Thoroughly inspect the premises before undertaking any action
- Identify and pinpoint the pests
- Understand their biology
- Select the appropriate, targeted, environmentally sound control mechanism
- Monitor efficacy



Stop Pampering Pests

“Hotels have so many compelling attributes that it doesn't matter what kind of pest you're talking about, they'll gravitate to where there's food, shelter, warmth, and water,” explains Greg Baumann, senior scientist and Vice President of Technical Services for National Pest Management Association. “Vigilance and education are your best defenses. For example, doors make a building vulnerable, especially those located back-of-house and those with no exterior handles. I realize the security issue here, but more often than not, they lead to an area where the kitchen staff hangs out for a smoke; the door's propped open and presto, you have a mouse on the inside. Since a mouse is capable of reproducing at six weeks old, elementary math tells you that one mouse can become an epidemic within a month.” Greg continues with another pet peeve: room service trays. “When trays are left in hotel corridors for an inordinate amount of time, they become unnecessary sources of food for pests. This alone should be reason enough to have any and all staff pick up dead trays as part of their job description.”

K-9 Rescue Remedy

But all is not lost. Bed Bug Dog Detectives are the latest innovation in the pest management industry. Trained by the Florida Canine (K9) Academy, these certified dog inspectors are fast becoming a valued partner in the industry's gold standard Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program.



Trained to sniff out bed bugs - some dogs also “do” termites - behind walls and baseboards, under carpets and bedding, in nightstands, mattresses, and box springs. “The Nose” is considered cutting-edge technology. To date, it is the only inspection tool that can pinpoint problems in minutes, yet it would take staff over an hour to discover the same. To wit, government authorities in Germany found that a typical office building search of approximately 200 rooms can take one dog only eight hours to complete. Boasting 90% accuracy, these rescue remedies have proven to save both time and remediation costs.

Flying Enemies

While mice, roaches and bedbugs are the most talked about pests, hotel operators need to be aware of other critters of growing concern. Whether residential or commercial, seagulls and pigeons can destroy a building within a few years - pigeons are attracted to the scent of their mother's droppings, and are known to carry several disease-causing organisms, including salmonella food poisoning, histoplasmosis - a fungal disease that can infect people, and ectoparasites such as mites, fleas, ticks, and bugs that may readily bite people. Discourage bird feeders.

Although flea collars and more effective shampoos have put most flea epidemics on the back burner, evidence suggests there's a resurgence of fleas, so pet-friendly hotels need to take special note. Reports are rare but as a worst case scenario, fleas are capable of transmitting plague and murine typhus to humans - a disease of headaches, nausea, and body rashes that if left untreated can last for months. Isolate pet friendly rooms; consider pet “spa” services such as aromatic flea baths and gift collars.



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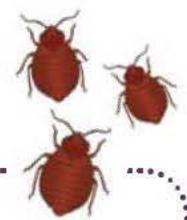
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Sand flies (also of the flea family) are endemic to many coastal properties and with the trend for eco-adventure and "bringing the outdoors inside", encourage guests to "shake loose and rinse off" before entering their rooms. Beachside guestrooms and spa beds on the sand are especially prone.



A Fiery Horizon?

With a name derived from their tempestuous bite, fire ants have always been associated with the hotter climates of their native South America, and the southern states. But these hardy insects are already in Oregon and gradually marching north. While winters along the East Coast will certainly stop them in their tracks, climate change (this past winter not withstanding) is leaning to warmer temperatures in the West and some entomologists are predicting their arrival in BC within the decade. Just as the pine beetle has survived to reek its havoc north of the 49th, so fire ants could well be the next invader set to destroy lawns, parks, gardens, golf courses, and agriculture. We can only hope that ant-loving insects such as spiders won't find them too spicy to digest! ⚡



Good Night, Sleep Tight

Check this list so bugs won't bite

Contrary to popular perception, bed bugs have more to do with poor awareness than poor sanitation. Proactive housekeeping inspections are the best way to keep bed bugs at bay.

- Train staff to recognize and report infestations.
- Check the crevasses and seams of mattresses and mattress covers as well as beneath the tag and behind headboards.
- Watch for
 - Tiny black spots (excrement) that look like poppy seeds
 - Tiny blood spots on the bedding
 - Translucent light brown skins or even live bugs
 - Foul odor in and around bed.
- Purchase mattress and box spring encasements to prevent bed bugs from invading mattresses.
- Practice a routine mattress sanitation system.
- For rural and oceanside properties, keep nesting birds (swallows in particular host bed bugs) away from the rafters and clear beaches of rotting seaweed.