

## Vacuum and Steam Get Bed Bugs Out of the Carpet, Too BY L.R. OWENS

It's no secret a problem most of us thought was long gone, has made its way back with a vengeance. Bed bugs! They've not only returned, but have created a need for extra cleaning protocols for hotels, restaurant owners and maintenance professionals across the country. One thing not to forget is that bed bugs not only take up residence in linens and mattresses, they're also quite at home in carpeting as well.

In fact, the pesky little creatures thrive in carpets and rugs. Unless special care is taken, it can be tough to fully rid an infected space of bed bugs. So, what are they, anyway?

Bed bugs or the *Cimex lectularius* are small parasitic insects that feed on human blood. However, they will feed on other hosts such as animals when humans are not available. They usually are nocturnal and most likely come out at night, hence the name bed bugs. Though long thought to have been eradicated in North America around the time of World War II, recent evidence shows them making quite a comeback.

Bed bugs can carry bloodborne diseases, result in severe allergic reactions, and can actually cause anemia in some. However, science and researchers are still debating these issues.

But why the sudden resurrection of bed bugs in North America? As of right now, the exact cause is not completely known or understood. But, there are theories. Some think it is due to evolution of the bug itself, over time it has become immune to the pesticides once used to kill them. In the 1940s DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) was heavily used as a pesticide, but was banned in the '80s, because of its risk to human health.

Another theory places the blame on increased travel abroad. Travelers in hotels may unwittingly attract them, and the bed bugs hide in their luggage and then are transported into the United States. Bed bugs have been found in private residences, apartment complexes, dormitories, hotels, military barracks and clothing stores.

There are many, many myths regarding bed bugs. People believe that bed bugs are microscopic and cannot be seen with the naked eye. Not true; you can actually see these bugs as well as their eggs. Another myth involves bed bugs fleeing bright lights. Not true. Although they prefer the dark, keeping the area well lit will not deter them.

Another huge myth: pesticides alone will remove bed bug infestations. Also, not true. Although proper use of pesticides can be an inherent part of a pest control plan, they will not rid your premises of bed bugs alone. In fact, bed bugs, depending on location, may actually be immune or resistant to many pesticides. Therefore, they need to be controlled through a comprehensive thorough cleaning strategy.

The emergence of bed bugs has not been ignored by the cleaning industry. In fact, there are many companies that offer products and services that not only help prevent an infestation, but can rid properties of them. Last month, there was a “National Bed Bug Summit,” held in Washington, D.C., during which pest control experts and entomologists discussed prevention, education, and combating bed bugs.

Industrial cleaning equipment manufacturer Tornado Industries released a white paper, “Effective Treatment of Bed Bug Infestations,” giving customers tips on how to rid their businesses of bed bugs. “This is an issue that has been in the news a lot lately, and we have been asked what the cleaning industry can do to assist in addressing the problem,” said Michael Schaffer, senior executive with Tacony’s commercial floorcare division and President of Tornado Industries.

BOMA International also is offering classes to teach commercial business owners of the threats of bed bug infestations not only causing diseases but also causing companies to spend money on remediation.

One of the biggest agreements among experts is that not only must you clean linens and mattresses. You must also rid your carpets of bed bugs. Vacuum,

Vacuum, Vacuum and Steam

First and foremost, carpets must be vacuumed and steam cleaned if possible. Start by identifying and paying close attention to areas that run along walls, like the perimeters of rooms. Vacuum the crevices where the

wall meets the carpets. Take special care with corners and hidden surfaces. It might be necessary to lift edges of carpeting and vacuum underneath as well.

And, to really assure you've gotten all the bugs and their eggs, steam or high heat might be the knockout punch you need. Many experts believe steam is key to alleviating the problem. These systems do not require chemicals and are one of the most effective and environmentally responsible tools available to tackle the job, according to expert opinion.

Schaffer says, using the steam-heat treatment "can dramatically reduce the amount of pesticides necessary, making this an effective, healthier and much more environmentally responsible way of handling the bedbug problem."

"Heat is the Achilles heel of bedbugs," he said. "Some professional-grade steam cleaners provide high enough temperature (around 250° F), adequate [steam] flow, and the precise delivery necessary to kill not only active adult bedbugs but also their eggs."

Dr. Kathy Heinsohn, Entomologist, told the Washington Post, "There's no silver bullet. But, certainly we can manage it. It just requires a lot of education." □