

Bed Bugs: Beware the Nightly Bite.

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For nearly fifty years bed bugs were extremely rare in developed countries. Yet since the start of the new millennium there has been a worldwide resurgence in this nuisance insect pest. In Australia alone, bed bug infestations increased by an astonishing 4,500% between the years 2000 and 2006. The problem with bed bugs is that they bite and they tend to attack during the night while we are fast asleep. When biting, bed bugs spit saliva into the victim and this can lead to the development of extremely itchy skin lesions that can last for days to even weeks. Many people are understandably horrified at the thought of being attacked by insects in their own bed and this can result in considerable mental anguish. Bed bugs are also very expensive to treat and represent a litigation risk for the accommodation industry. As such they have become a major financial impost to this industry which has been impacted the most by return of these little blood suckers.

So why have bed bugs made a sudden reappearance? One reason relates to the sheer vast amount of international travel that occurs today. Bed bugs readily invade luggage within an infested room and can then be passed elsewhere. The availability of affordable travel means that bed bugs have quickly spread around the world. However, the main reason is insecticide resistance within the insect. In fact the vast majority of insecticides that are available today are simply no longer effective at killing bed bugs. What is worse is that these same insecticides, if poorly applied, can result in the infestation spreading, which is a major problem in apartment blocks.

The high levels of insecticide resistance mean that modern bed bugs are extremely difficult to control and this has meant that treatment failures have been all too common. In response to this situation, the Australian Environmental Pest Managers Association (AEPMA) has worked in collaboration with leading researchers and pest managers to produce a Code of Practice for the Control of Bed Bug Infestations. This code is available as a free download from www.bedbug.org.au and aims to promote 'best practice' in the eradication of active infestations and the management of potential bed bug infestations. It is essential for pest managers who undertake bed bug eradication to have received specific training in the control of these insects which is based on the Code of Practice. A training curriculum has been devised by the Code of Practice Working Party and a list of those pest managers that have completed this curriculum is now available on the above web site.