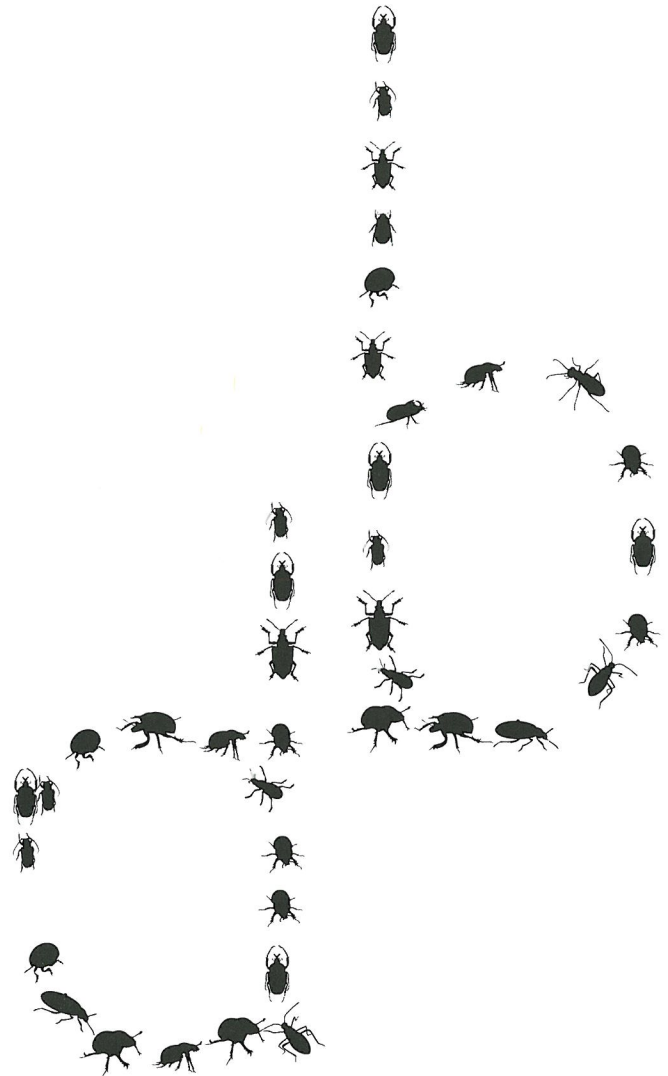


don't let the



I was beginning to get sleepy, having just finished watching an episode of “CSI” when the phone rang. It was my daughter and she sounded a bit frantic. I asked her what was wrong. She said she had several welts or bites on her arm, and she had noticed a small insect on her leg that had fallen off and scurried away.

“You need to do something, Dad!” she cried.

I *did* have to do something because I knew she had bedbugs. As the department head of the division that managed her building, it was now my responsibility. But Class A high-rises are not supposed to have bedbugs.

Bedbugs have been considered the scourge of mankind for many centuries. If, or when, word gets out that you have a bedbug problem in your property, public relations can be a nightmare. Americans are typically quite agitated by the thought of any insect infestation and are very wary they might be “infected” by their neighbor who has the

problem. The key to controlling the bad publicity is to treat the problems immediately and continue to check for signs that they might return. The following will help you understand the reason for this growing epidemic and how you can best eradicate and ward off bedbug infestations.

WHO ARE THESE CRITTERS?

Bedbugs are very small insects (about the size of the end of a pencil point) that live in warm or controlled climates, including residential housing. They are light-shy and tend to hide in dark places, such as voids in walls and bed boards. At night or during periods of very low light, they search for a mammal from which to extract blood. Not all people react to the bite. Some people have developed

IREM MEMBER OFFERS SOLUTIONS
TO ELIMINATING A FAST-GROWING PEST PROBLEM

BY GREG MARTIN, CPM® EMERITUS

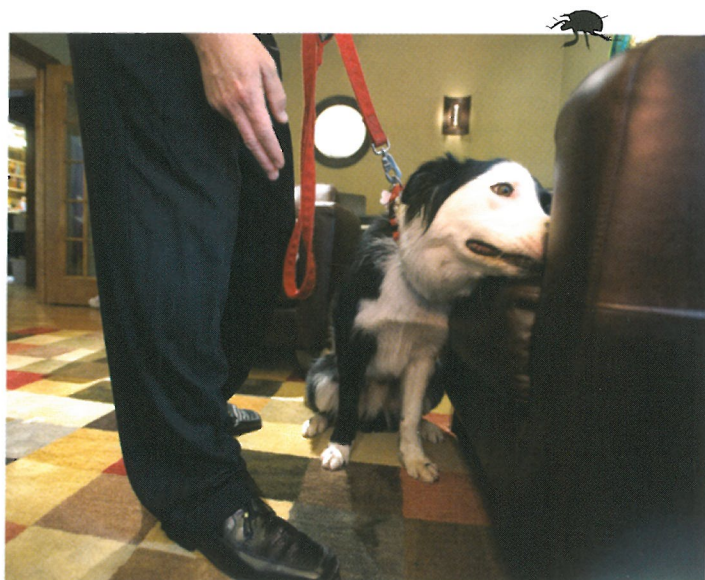


immunity to these insects while others develop large welts.

Although they are not a known carrier of diseases, bedbugs are a great nuisance once they have fed because they lay eggs, which can stick to any variety of objects such as shoes, mattresses, couches, etc. Residents who visit a home infested with bedbugs can accidentally pick up the egg casings on their clothes or shoes. Live bedbugs can hide in packages or other objects that may be moved from one housing unit to another, including used furniture or bedding. In addition, bedbugs will travel from one apart-

ment to another along electrical or plumbing runs, as well as under the unit dividing walls.

Bedbugs were virtually eradicated when DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) was developed in 1939 and subsequently put to use for pest control issues. DDT was later discovered to have a number of disastrous and deadly side effects and was banned in 1972. Following the ban on DDT, the birds and other affected animals (along with the bedbugs) have rebuilt their populations. There is presently no effective alternative treatment for completely



EXTERMINATORS COMMONLY USE PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED DOGS WITH HIGHLY SENSITIVE NOSES, LIKE THESE BORDER COLLIES, TO SEARCH FOR BEDBUGS.



PHOTOS © WILD GOOSE CHASE

eradicating bedbugs, and their population appears to be exponentially increasing.

RESIDENT REACTIONS

Because of the bedbugs' ability to hide and because their egg casings can be accidentally moved, it is difficult to affix blame for the pests getting into a property. There is not an infallible method to pinpoint the source of the bedbug infestation in a residential unit. Currently, it is best to work closely with residents to keep further infestations from occurring.

Most residents become quite upset about bedbugs when they learn they have them (they think of the insects along the same lines as a vampire cockroach!). They are even unhappier when all their cloth material must be cleaned and most of their possessions within the unit are moved for the exterminator to fully treat the unit.

Although the majority of your residents will be disgusted by bedbugs, it's important to keep in mind that many foreign residents may be indifferent to a bedbug infestation and some may even have developed immunity to bedbug bites. Bedbugs are so common in some countries that they may be treated the same way we think of flies or spiders in the United States. Unfortunately, a bedbug problem will not be reported by these unconcerned residents and the bedbugs can spread out to all contiguous units by crawling through electric conduits, pipe chaises and outlet voids.

SEARCH & DESTROY

Once you have confirmed you have bedbugs (sometimes they can be mistaken for bat bugs or an errant deer tick) you need to determine what remedies are available and what areas of the property to treat. Given the common and convenient means for bedbugs to travel from one place to another, it is extremely important to treat all apartments beneath, above and on the sides of the infected unit. If any are found to contain bedbugs, you then have to expand your area of treatment and inspection of apartments. You have to continue inspecting apartments until you come to one that is bedbug-free. There are professionally trained dogs with highly sensitive noses that are much better suited to finding bedbugs than humans. Ask your exterminator about the inspection methods they use.

You then have to treat all of the units that are found to have the bedbugs. Traditionally, all clothes and fabrics need to be removed and laundered, or disposed of properly. Furniture that is covered with soft fabric needs to be

ONCE YOU HAVE CONFIRMED YOU HAVE BEDBUGS YOU NEED TO DETERMINE WHAT REMEDIES ARE AVAILABLE AND WHAT AREAS OF THE PROPERTY TO TREAT.

treated with a steam gun (temperature must reach 120 degrees). This heated steam will kill the bugs and their eggs. All other areas of the unit need to be treated with insecticide or diatomaceous earth. Any chemicals should be applied by a licensed exterminator and the residents must vacate the unit for 8 hours. The key is to make sure that all areas that could harbor bedbugs, including any clutter and tightly packed belongings, are treated by the exterminator. A typical infestation will cost you about \$300 to \$400 for each unit requiring treatment.

Because of the incubation period of the bedbug eggs, the treated units must be inspected every week and re-treated if live bedbugs are found. Once you have two periods in succession where no live bedbugs are found, you can discontinue weekly inspections.

If you are looking for a more effective and less disruptive alternative to the steam gun and insecticide treatment, there is one available. A portable heat unit can be placed in the affected apartment to heat the unit to 150 degrees. This heat needs to permeate the unit for 6 hours in order to kill all the bedbugs, as well as the egg casings. This method of treatment is fairly expensive because of the set up and cost of the equipment (\$1000 per unit) but the treatment is much more effective. A word of caution: You have to be very diligent in not allowing a resident to take out articles prior to the heat treatment only to return with the untreated items, or you'll be right back where you started.

At this point in time, numerous task forces and informational committees are forming to address the above problems; more information concerning these pesky critters will be available soon. In the meantime, until somebody comes up with a low-cost solution for eradicating bedbugs, they are likely to continue to be a nuisance. ■



Greg L. Martin, CPM® Emeritus, is the vice president of Draper and Kramer, Inc., a property and financial services firm in Chicago. He has worked in the real estate industry for over 33 years, and has served as IREM Chicago Chapter President and on a national level for IREM as a Regional Vice President and a member of the IREM Executive Committee.



[TOP] RUNNING A PORTABLE HEAT UNIT IN AN APARTMENT AT 150 DEGREES FOR 6 HOURS IS AN EFFICIENT WAY TO ELIMINATE BEDBUGS AND THEIR EGG CASINGS. [BOTTOM] A BORDER COLLIE CONTINUES THE SEARCH FOR BEDBUGS.

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