



The Return of Bed Bugs: Challenges for Apartment Managers

What are Bed Bugs?

In the past half dozen years, alarming stories and statistics about a global resurgence of bed bugs have been reported. Bed bugs are small, reddish-brown wingless insects with flat oval bodies. They are usually about a quarter inch long and an eighth-inch wide. Bed bugs remain hidden in dark concealed places until they emerge to feed, typically at night or in darkened rooms during daytime hours. Bed bugs cannot fly, but they are highly mobile, and can cling to fibrous material such as drapes, upholstery, bedding, clothing, and soft luggage. Bed bug eggs, nymphs, and adults cling to guests' clothing, shoes, luggage, golf bags, and other items. Though bed bugs are not known to transmit any infectious diseases, their presence makes most people uncomfortable, both physically and psychologically. Though bed bugs may be found in any residential property, they are a particular problem in apartments. A single infested unit can result in tenant complaints, lost business, increased legal costs, and damaged reputation. While bed bugs cannot be eliminated entirely, they can be controlled with a sound management plan, prompt action, and continued vigilance.

Take Steps to Prevent Infestation

Because almost every apartment building will experience bed bugs at some time, it's essential to have a plan in place to recognize, prevent, and respond to outbreaks. A timely, appropriate response will often be sufficient to satisfy affected tenants, preserve the building's reputation, and head off litigation, and will thus be more cost-efficient in the long run. Effective planning requires the involvement of property management, tenants, and a reliable, competent pest control professional. An effective plan will cover:

- **Awareness and Training.** Ensure that all staff and tenants can identify bed bugs and the signs of an infestation. Local pest control professionals may provide the training.
- **Appropriate Furnishings.** In furnished apartments, choose new furnishings that are least likely to harbor bed bugs. Avoid built-in furniture, as this is extremely difficult to remove, dismantle, and clean should an infestation occur. Use leather or vinyl upholstery; choose metal, glass, or laminate furniture over wood; and install hard floors (wood, tile, linoleum, etc.) instead of carpets or rugs. Purchase only new mattresses, and cover them with vinyl or anti-allergy covers. Avoid bedspreads, bed skirts, or drapes which touch the floor. Keep bed frames, bedside tables, and headboards away from walls and drapes.
- **Inspection and Monitoring.** Early detection and eradication is essential to prevent or limit infestations. Schedule regular inspections that will cover all units and common areas on a rotating basis. Focus inspections on dark, hidden, protected areas, with special attention to fabrics, wood, and paper surfaces preferred by bed bugs.
- **Housekeeping.** Good housekeeping will help control bed bugs. Advise tenants to clean their units regularly, and to

look for and report signs of bed bugs. Show them how to target vacuuming to areas favored by bedbugs, especially dark and concealed areas near and around beds.

- **Maintenance.** To limit areas where bed bugs can hide, and to prevent the spread of bed bugs, keep property in good repair. Use caulk, foam, paint, or other sealants to close cracks, crevices, and other openings in walls, ceilings, and floors and between rooms and between units. Re-glue loose wallpaper, and patch cracked or peeling paint or blemishes in walls or ceilings.

Develop a Response Plan

Because almost every apartment building will experience bed bugs at some time, it's essential to have a plan to recognize, prevent, and respond to outbreaks *before* they become big problems. A timely, appropriate response will often be sufficient to satisfy affected tenants and residents, preserve the property's reputation, and head off litigation, and will thus be more cost-efficient than doing nothing. Effective planning requires the involvement, cooperation, and commitment of the property manager, tenants and residents, and a reliable, competent pest control professional. A plan should include:

- Descriptions and floor plans of all properties.
- Names, contact information, and responsibilities of relevant staff and pest control professionals.
- Relevant forms to support reporting, inspection, treatments, follow-up, tenant relations, etc.
- Training materials and documentation.
- Procedures to follow in the event of an infestation.
- Fact sheets for employees and tenants.

Refer to state laws and municipal regulations to determine the rights and responsibilities of owners, property managers, and tenants for control of pests, including control of bed bugs. In various jurisdictions, under certain conditions, property owners may be required to (among other things):

- Include language in lease documents to 1) describe rights and responsibilities of owners and tenants; 2) allow inspection and treatment of units; and 3) provide detail on how inspections, notification, and treatment will be done.
- Provide tenants with information on bed bugs and guidance on prevention and treatment.
- Inform neighboring tenants about potential infestations and possible inspections.
- Inspect and treat affected units and neighboring units.
- Work with and assist tenants in resolving bed bug issues, including providing cleaning and laundry services, storage for personal property, and referrals to medical or pest control professionals.

For detailed information on preparing a bed bug response plan, request the *Sequoia Risk Management Guide* "Understanding and Responding to Bed Bugs: Issues and Guidance for Apartment Buildings." (SRMG-007)