

Bed Bug Monitors – The Game Changer in the Fight against Bed Bugs
By Douglas Stern, Managing Partner for Stern Environmental Group

The “pest of the 21st century” is what urban entomologist Michael Potter calls the tiny, blood-sucking pests that are spreading panic across the country. A leading expert on the habits and resurgence of *Cimex lectularius*, the common bed bug, the University of Kentucky researcher has found that modern bed bugs are increasingly resistant to pyrethroid insecticides commonly used to control them. Even worse, bed bugs are passing this resistance onto their offspring. Already a problem for apartment owners and property managers, a super bed bug is not a welcome thought, particularly with state legislation and municipal regulations placing the onus for dealing with these problem pests at landlords’ doorsteps.

Bed bugs have been sharing beds with humans for centuries. After World War II, DDT effectively annihilated the pest in America and Western countries, although bed bugs continued to flourish in less developed countries. The banning of DDT coupled with the growth of international travel has caused a resurgence of man’s age-old nemesis. Since the 1990s, reported bed bug infestations in the U.S. have increased 500%. Bed bugs are now common in all 50 states with infestations regularly reported in apartments, condominiums, hotels, college dormitories, office buildings, hospitals and private homes.

Adept hitchhikers, bed bugs travel into apartments on residents’ clothing, mattresses, furniture and inside packing boxes. Several recent infestations have been traced back to moving vans. Adult bed bugs are reddish brown and about the size of an apple seed, but nymphs and eggs are microscopic. Nuisance pests that feed on human blood, bed bugs do not transmit disease; but their bites can cause itchy, red welts, psychosomatic stress and severe allergic reactions. Feeding on sleeping humans at night, they hide in tiny crevices in or near beds between feedings. As an infestation grows, bed bugs spread to adjacent units through wall voids, electrical and plumbing conduits and air ducts. Bed bugs can easily spread through an apartment complex through shared laundry facilities or by maintenance workers.

Legally tasked with providing pest control for tenants, New Jersey apartment owners are faced with losing the litigation war. With new pending legislation, apartment owners may soon have to bear the responsibility and financial expense of providing housing that is rat, roach and soon to be bed bug-free. While other vermin can be eliminated with proper maintenance and control costs recouped in rent payments, bed bugs are an entirely different problem. Insects of convenience, they are not attracted by food or filth but are brought into apartments by residents. They are as likely to be found in upscale, well-maintained establishments as in tenements.

To date, efforts to combat bed bugs have focused on reactive measures aimed at treating the problem. Cutting-edge technologies at both ends of the temperature spectrum are being used to control insecticide-resistant bugs. New bed bug monitoring and trapping products just coming onto the pest control market offer the first opportunity for proactive prevention.

“I consider bed bug monitors a ‘game changer’ in the fight against bed bugs and one that no one is talking about yet,” said Douglas Stern, Managing Partner of Stern Environmental Group, an expert in the prevention and eradication of bed bugs. “Their use may soon be necessary for all

apartments and rental properties and may even be considered by judges and juries when defending against bed bug litigation.”

Monitors have the potential to alert property managers to bed bugs in the early stages of infestation while they are confined to the bed and bedroom. Early detection can allow property owners to arrange professional extermination of an affected apartment before pests spread. If bed bugs are discovered, monitors can determine the effectiveness of treatment and warn of re-infection. Monitoring adjacent apartments can alert property managers to spreading bed bugs, allowing targeted pest control. Early detection and intervention could save apartment owners thousands of dollars in professional pest control costs.

“This is a new field,” Stern admits. “No one really knows for sure what is best when it comes to monitoring for bed bugs. As pest control professionals, we have mainly been concerned with treating a problem after the fact.” But U.S. tests and European use indicate that proactive use of bed bug monitors has the potential to turn the tide in the bed bug battle. Some of the potentially game-changing products being introduced include:

NightWatch by BioSensory, Inc. uses heat, Carbon Dioxide to imitate a human sleeper, and pheromone lures to attract and trap bed bugs.

Bug Dome, developed by Silvandersson, an eco-friendly Swedish manufacturer, is a small discrete monitor that plugs into any wall outlet, using heat to lure bed bugs into replaceable glue traps.

BB Alert Active from MIDMOS, popular in Europe, uses replaceable packets of a blood-mimicking chemical attractant to entice bed bugs into a glue trap.

CDC 3000 by Cimex Science is a portable, electric monitoring and trapping device the size of a briefcase. Mimicking the presence of a human body with carbon dioxide, it lures bugs within a six-foot radius, trapping them on sealed slides for counting and documentation. Safe for use around children and pets, it can be moved from room to room.

Climbup Insect Interceptor by Susan McKnight Inc. is an inexpensive, low-tech device that is placed under bed posts to monitor bed bug presence. Concentric plastic rings coated with slippery talc trap bugs as they climb toward or from a bed.

Bed bug dogs are specially trained to sniff out bed bugs. Capable of detecting pests within a three-foot radius, dogs quickly target treatment areas or verify treatment success.

“Apartments and other managed properties may rent bed bug monitors in the near future to certify their property as being bed bug free,” Stern said. “The possible ‘real world’ uses for these new exciting products are endless.”

Bed bug monitoring can protect apartment owners from law suits, reassure tenants, maintain property value and reputation and, if bed bugs are discovered, minimize spread and extermination expense. Bed bug monitors are the first real proactive weapon in the battle against bed bugs.

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