

## BASIC BED BUG CONTROL PRACTICES: WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A PEST MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL

A bed bug infestation needs to be evaluated and treated by a pest management professional, sometimes called “exterminators.” The types and costs of the services these companies and personnel provide vary widely, as does the quality of the service. This guide will help purchasers and providers of pest management services understand what basic services are essential for bed bug identification and treatment.

### SELECTING A PEST MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL

- The consumer should always request and check references of companies or individuals that provide pest control services. While many people may not want their pest management professional (PMP) to share information about their bed bug infestation, many will agree to provide a positive reference about the quality of the work that was performed.
- Anyone providing pest control services must have a Pesticide Business Registration and Pesticide Applicator Certification from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Certification status can be checked at: <http://www.dec.ny.gov/permits/209.html> .
- Make sure prospective PMPs demonstrate:
  - Knowledge and prior experience in dealing with bed bugs;
  - Commitment to use of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices for bed bug prevention and control. IPM involves inspection and treatment methods that are not entirely dependent on the use of chemicals;
  - Willingness to listen and respond appropriately to questions and concerns; and
  - Ability to explain clearly what actions will be needed to treat bed bugs.
  - .For more information about how to choose a PMP, please refer to [Choosing and Working with a Pest Management Company](#).

### WHAT SERVICES SHOULD BE EXPECTED

- **An Action Plan.** The PMP should provide an action plan of what will be done to successfully treat for bed bugs. The plan should address the approach of the PMP to bed bugs, including:
  - What is expected of the customer, including how to prepare for an inspection
  - Expected timeline for treatment and re-inspection
  - The possible remedies the PMP will employ to address bed bug findings
  - Education. A PMP should educate its customers about bed bugs in order to help prevent further infestations and spread.
- **Disclosure of Chemical Use.** If pesticides will be used, the PMP must provide a copy of the label and material safety data sheet (MSDS) of these products, if requested.
- **Service Agreement.** Once an inspection is complete, the PMP should provide a service agreement detailing the scope of work proposed to treat the bed bug infestation. The agreement should include provisions for follow-up inspection(s) and treatment(s). It should also include a clear understanding of all guarantees, exclusions and limitations. These should be discussed with the customer.
- **Cost Estimate.** An estimate of the cost of the agreed services should be provided in advance of any billable work, and based upon inspection findings. Costs for additional services should be discussed and agreed upon, before the additional services are initiated.
- **Expected Outcome.** The PMP should discuss with the customer and agree on a reasonable outcome before entering into an agreement. The PMP should point out any concerns he or she may have that will influence the success of the treatment such as the condition of adjoining units and the customer’s failure to adequately prepare for treatment.

## WHAT CAN A PMP EXPECT FROM THE CUSTOMER FOR SUCCESSFUL TREATMENT?

- Full access to the infested residence for inspection and possible treatment.
- Preparing the site for an inspection and/or treatment, which may include moving objects away from walls, removing clutter, clearing shelves and furniture, bagging clothes and other personal items. Some companies provide these services or can recommend a company that can provide them. The preparation will vary with the extent and nature of the infestation. The preparation requested should be based upon the following:
  - Severity of the infestation
  - Distribution of the infestation within the infested living area
  - Degree of clutter
  - Physical conditions of the structure
  - Knowledge and prior experience in dealing with bed bugs

## INSPECTION

- A thorough inspection should be done by the PMP to confirm the presence of bed bugs. Visual evidence of live bed bugs or the presence of viable eggs is necessary to confirm a bed bug infestation. The PMP should also aim to determine source(s) of infestations, and based on the physical conditions of the unit and presence of at risk populations such as the elderly, children and pets, decide on the treatment needed. Inspection may seem intrusive, but in many cases will be needed to find and control infestations. The extent of the inspection may vary based on the level of infestation observed. The following should be the primary focus:
  - **Sleeping Areas.** Inspect these areas first and move outward to other parts of the unit. Care should be taken to avoid spreading bed bugs to other areas. The bed may need to be disassembled to enable a full examination. Remove the bed sheets and examine the mattress, box springs (top and underside) and bed frame. Check the edges, seams, buttons, tears, creases, zippers, tags, folds and other potential hiding areas.
  - **Furniture and Furnishings.** Closely examine all items and furniture in the bedroom, sleeping areas or other areas where persons spend time, such as the living room. This may involve opening drawers and looking behind and underneath all surfaces and joints. Pay attention to upholstered furniture and their cushions as well as closets, bookshelves and other furniture. Look behind wall hangings including pictures and other decorative fixtures. Do the same for furniture and furnishings in other rooms to determine the extent of the infestation. Inspect unusual hiding spots such as the telephone, clocks, books, screw holes and even electronics.
  - **Other Sites.** Check all cracks, crevices, narrow spaces, and voids. Look at the edges of peeling wall paper as well as the edges of carpeting and moldings.
- Should the PMP utilize the services of a bed bug scent-detecting dog, any positive bed bug indication should be confirmed by a visual inspection..
- Though bed bug monitors have limitations, many PMP's use them to supplement their control strategy.
- In multiple dwellings, the PMP should inspect apartments adjacent to, above and below any unit that has a confirmed bed bug infestation, as well as all common areas such as lounges, game rooms, and laundry and storage areas.

## TREATMENT

- The PMP should use a multi-faceted integrated pest management (IPM) approach, which should include non-chemical methods as well as the appropriate use of pesticides.
- The PMP should include customer education as a part of their treatment and encourage property owners and building managers to inform tenants of surrounding units that a neighboring unit has bed bugs.
- Treatment should be tailored to the level and physical extent of the infestation. The control effort should include:
  - Physically remove or destroy visible bed bugs and eggs
  - Inspect and treat if necessary, all possible hiding places of bed bugs
  - Contain or minimize the dispersal of bed bugs to unaffected areas.

- Use pesticide appropriately and as specified by the label.
- Advise the customer to continue the non-chemical control efforts such as frequent inspection, laundering, vacuuming, and using mattress and box spring encasements.
- If pesticides are to be used, the PMP should consider the following:
  - Use pesticides that pose the lowest risk possible and are approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.
  - Always follow label directions and provide copies of labels and material safety data sheets (MSDS).
  - Do not apply pesticides to mattresses and box springs. Consider non chemical treatment such as steaming, vacuuming and encasements.
- The PMP should not use insecticidal bombs or fumigants for the control of bed bugs.

### **HANDLING INFESTED ITEMS**

- Customers should be informed of the proper storage and/or laundering of possibly infested items until the bed bugs have been controlled.
- The PMP should discourage wherever possible the disposal of household items as this can cause undue hardship and expense to the customer. In most cases items can be treated.
- To determine if an item should be discarded, the PMP should consider the level of infestation and the effort needed to treat these items. If the cost of treatment exceeds the value of replacing the item, the item should be discarded
- The PMP should provide the customer with instructions on how to safely discard infested items which cannot be salvaged, without spreading bed bugs to other areas.

### **FOLLOW-UP**

Bed bug infestations are rarely eliminated in a single visit. The PMP should schedule follow-up inspections within two to three weeks of the final treatment to ensure the bed bug problem has been resolved. Follow-up inspections should include:

- Interviewing occupants to determine if they have seen any new activity or experienced any new bites.
- Monitoring bed bug detection devices, such as interceptors and other traps.
- Informing customers of conditions that are serving as obstacles, such as clutter, to the elimination of the bed bugs and requesting specific cooperation to overcome obstacles.
- An additional survey or inspection is recommended approximately one month after the problem is believed to be resolved to avoid a rebound effect from an infestation that “appeared” to have been eliminated.