

Bed Bugs

Class-is in Session

Learn to avoid PR nightmares when treating schools

By Jeff White • Contributor

One of the most common misperceptions the public has about bed bugs is they're solely pests of the home. Unfortunately, this persistent pest is rearing its head in other locations such as office buildings, movie theaters and public transportation vehicles. As if these locations weren't concerning enough, media outlets are focusing on a new location generating even greater public outcry—school buildings.

Because school buildings are poised to become the next bed bug hot zone, technicians must prepare to treat these nontraditional sites. If a school calls you for a bed bug inspection, consider the following tips to avoid a political and public relations nightmare.

Where to Look

Whenever bed bugs are introduced into an environment people don't typically sleep in, their behavior can be unpredictable and visual inspections can be unreliable. If a problem exists in a residential setting, technicians typically can focus on beds and couches to identify a problem quickly; but these strategies have little merit in schools.

When performing a visual inspection in a school, the cubicles where students store their bags and clothes and the desk chairs where they sit are good places to start. However, this may not be a reliable way to detect a problem. Because bugs are more likely to wander when a sleeping area isn't present, active bed bug moni-

tors or canine scent detection may be better options for environments where bed bug behavior is unpredictable.

An IPM State of Mind

Many states have specific regulations and guidelines that need to be followed when pesticide application is being considered in a school. Before any pesticides are applied, it's imperative to familiarize yourself with any state regulations. If you violate these regulations, you could expose your company to criticism from your client and the chance of losing a valuable account. Additionally, you could cause the school to pay stiff fines, generate attention from concerned parents and create long-term damage to your company's reputation.

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Technician's TIP

Using Paper Release Glue Boards

- Tear off perforated edge of the Trapper Max or Max Free Glue Traps placing glue edge directly against wall. This will prevent mice from scurrying by along the inside edge of the trap.



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Educate, Educate, Educate

We've all heard how important education is when dealing with bed bugs. Many people who aren't directly related to the pest control industry are unaware bed bugs are on the rise. In a school setting, education may be your best weapon against defensive school officials and a panicked parent community that has little to no knowledge about bed bugs.

Education helps calm hysteria because most parents don't understand the risk associated with bed bugs in schools. Parents tend to envision a school so infested with bed bugs their child will come home anemic with a backpack full of new house guests. Dispelling misconceptions and setting realistic expectations is the first step.

Next, consider providing helpful information about what parents can do at home if they're concerned about bed bugs. Tips include: bed encasements, Packrite portable heating units, Climbup insect interceptors and laundering. Lastly, keeping backpacks in a smooth surfaced, sealed sweater box can potentially prevent infestation of the home if a bed bug is transported via a backpack.

One or Many

The most important task of a pest management professional (PMP) is to determine if one bug was introduced to the classroom or if a reproducing infestation exists. These are drastically different scenarios with different approaches. An ongoing problem may not occur if the only bug that was introduced was the bug that was found. Even if a reproducing infestation isn't confirmed, a thorough inspection and a nonchemical treatment should be considered

to control any issues that may have been missed. Inspections and nonchemical treatments also show a corrective action was taken, which can ease concerned parents and school officials.

If a reproducing infestation or multiple bugs are found, an aggressive approach should be considered. Bed bugs can quickly become entrenched in difficult-to-treat areas, and an action plan involving the pest control company and school officials should be developed immediately.

Nonchemical Spot Treatments

There are effective, nonchemical spot treatments that help eliminate bugs that may be present. The two that many have relied on in school settings use extreme temperatures: steam and cold treatment (Cryonite). These methods can be used to address bugs and eggs that can't be seen through visual inspections. They're also well received in a school setting because they don't rely on pesticides. The results achieved through visual inspection, monitoring and canine scent detection can be used to target your nonchemical spot treatments.

Pesticides

If a reproducing bed bug infestation is found, pesticide application may be a necessary step in the elimination process. A PMP always must keep all school officials involved in the decision-making process when pesticides are required. This will ensure any notifications required by law can be delivered. Once the application is scheduled, low-toxicity products should be chosen and applied in a targeted, low-volume fashion to reduce exposure to the students.

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Infested Furniture

If infested furniture is identified, disposal may be an option worth considering. While an aggressive non-chemical treatment may be successful eliminating bed bugs from a piece of school furniture, there isn't a 100% guarantee it'll work. Schools may not want to risk exposing students to furniture they thought was bed bug free.

If furniture needs to be salvaged, commodity heating and fumigation may be the most effective options for 100% elimination in a time-efficient fashion. While both of these methods tend to cost more, they offer a much stronger guarantee the furniture is bed bug free. Nonchemical contact tools and pesticides also are options.

Avoid PR Nightmares

School children being exposed to bed bugs can be a PR nightmare. The situation can spin out of control when a local newspaper writes a front-page story about bed bugs in schools and hysterical parents quickly appear at the front door looking to pull their children out of the classroom. An even sadder outcome may be when a particular student is blamed for the infestation and is the subject of ridicule and shame.

Working with school officials about how to position inspections and control efforts in a positive fashion can be one of your most worthwhile tasks. You also should prepare

any technicians working with bed bugs in schools to not speak with anyone about the situation other than school officials. Controlling the flow of information is critical when treating schools.

When children go to school, the last thing parents want to see are bed bugs joining them in the classroom. This situation can be sensitive, unpredictable and difficult to evaluate. A controlled, well-designed team effort can be the most effective way to prevent students coming home from school with more than just the common cold. **PMP**

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