

Bedbugs bite students more ways than one

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Good night, sleep tight. Don't let the bedbugs bite.

Maybe easier said than done for at least one Plum Street resident.

The resident, who wishes to remain anonymous, has been battling bedbugs for nearly two months now, and it seems he is not alone.

"After we got it, we realized it was not just our house," the resident said. "I began to see that sporadically during garbage pickup, at least three or four houses on my street had mattresses and couches out."

Soon the resident realized the problem was spreading, as furniture quickly was beginning to be removed on neighboring Harvey and High Streets.

"Almost systematically near every garbage pickup, they will also have furniture out," the resident said.

Dave Padlo, a School of Arts and Sciences sophomore living on Plum Street, said he has heard of at least one house in the area affected by bedbugs.

"Thank god it wasn't us," Padlo said.

Incidents of bedbugs have been on the rise steadily for the last few years, said Jennifer Erdogan, manager of the bedbug division at Parsippany-based Bell Environmental Services.

"They are prolific bugs," she said. "They multiply quickly and are really good hiders, can conceal themselves well and are very difficult to get rid of."

About a quarter inch in length and resembling the shape and color of an apple seed, bedbugs were eradicated in the United States post World War II thanks to strong pesticides like dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane — also known as DDT — Erdogan said.

But with the increase of international travel, the bugs have been bought back into this country from areas that never got rid of them, she said.

With DDT now banned, there are no pesticides that are really effective in killing bedbugs, causing some problems in house treatment, Erdogan said.

Bedbug bites vary from person to person, so there is no one characteristic that identifies them, Erdogan said. Some people can get small mosquito-like bites, while others may get welts, and still others may not be affected at all.

“It’s like poison ivy, some people are highly allergic and can’t even look at it without getting it and other people can roll around in it,” she said.

Though bites can itch and be irritating, bedbugs are fortunately not carriers of disease, she said.

Because bites vary so much, Erdogan said exterminators rely on physical evidence to detect the presence of bedbugs. Bell Environmental uses scent hounds to find the pests when there is even a small infestation, as well as traditional human inspections to see if a house is under attack.

“That’s the problem with them, is that people think they are only associated with the bed, but they can just as happily live in your desk across the room,” Erdogan said, who noted bedbugs can settle in sofas, couches and even base molding. “As long as they are near the host they are happy.”

Bell Environmental uses an Instant Freeze treatment, which instantly freezes the bugs and eggs on contact, effectively killing them, Erdogan said.

The treatments can be expensive — sometimes starting at \$900 — but are effective, she said.

“If you think you have a problem, be proactive and act early because really being proactive and discovering insects early is the key to irradiating them and eliminating them quicker,” Erdogan said.

Off-Campus Housing Services was unaware of any bedbug problems in New Brunswick, said Public Relations Specialist Debbie Kim.

Kim advises students who think they have bedbugs to speak with their landlord and check their lease to see who is responsible for extermination.

Kim said the New Jersey Legislature is currently considering Assembly Bill 3203/Senate Bill 2257, which would force landlords to pay for the bedbug treatment, conduct annual inspections and distribute informational packets on bedbugs to tenants.

The Assembly Bill was passed 74-3 on Feb. 2, while the Senate Bill remains in committee, according to the New Jersey Legislature Web site.

The Plum Street resident received approximately 10 mosquito-like bites but thought nothing of it, as he was working outside most of the summer.

After some time, though, the bedbugs started to bite his dog, and after a while, one small bug in his bed turned into almost 30 or 40.

He called for a local bedbug exterminator, who sprayed the house twice to hopefully eradicate the pests. Though the landlord paid for the exterminator, he did not pay for the entire cost of the bedbug treatment.

The resident had to throw away furniture, a mattress and any “questionable items,” including irreplaceable records he used as a DJ.

"I'm probably out a couple grand," he said.

But the infestation's greatest casualty was one without a price tag: his psyche.

"Most of [the problem] is just the actual stress of going to sleep and knowing that they could be crawling on you," said anonymous Plum Street resident.

Luke Molloy, a former resident on Plum Street, said bedbug infestations forced him to move to Highland Park.

Even after having his house sprayed, bedbugs still returned to Molloy's house. Though he learned to deal with the pests, Molloy said his roommates sometimes stayed up all night shining flashlights all over their beds.

"It made some people go crazy," Molloy said.

The anonymous Plum Street resident said the city of New Brunswick should adopt a contingency plan to deal with bedbugs and the removal of affected items or garbage days to prevent their spread.

"The city needs to understand that this is as serious a housing issue as anything else going on like over occupancy or lead paint," he said. "It's equally a serious problem and they need to think of a way to deal with it."