



# Bed Bug Action Plan for Hotels

*Dini M. Miller, Ph.D., Department of Entomology, Virginia Tech*

## Introduction

It is important to realize that no bed bug treatment is 100% effective (except building fumigation), and there is no way to guarantee that bed bugs are completely gone. It is for these reasons that the bed bug situation is particularly challenging for the hospitality industry, where a hotel chain's reputation can be jeopardized by a single bed bug incident. Having your hotel written up in the newspaper or on TripAdvisor as having a bed bug infestation requires a rapid and public response. You must let the public know that your hotel has a bed bug action plan.

In the year 2000, the hospitality industry did not want to adopt bed bug action plans. Having a bed bug action plan was like admitting your hotel had bed bugs. Now it is 10 years later, and if your hotel does not have a bed bug action plan, you are at risk of losing your reputation and a lawsuit. The purpose of this publication is to provide you with the information that you could use to develop a bed bug prevention program and action plan for your facilities.

## Bed Bug Prevention (Early Detection)

There is no way to stop bed bugs from being brought into a hotel. New guests are arriving every day from all over the world, and bringing their potentially infested luggage with them. Your hotel can be bed bug free one day and infested in multiple rooms the next. So prevention, in the lodging industry, is really early detection. Bed bugs must be detected very quickly after they are brought in, hopefully, before they bite someone.

To facilitate this early bed bug detection, all hotel employees should receive some bed bug identification training. This includes the reception staff, maids, facilities personnel, hotel managers, event planners, maintenance staff, catering staff, bell hops, cooks, janitors, and absolutely everyone else. Why everyone? Because your employees are located all over the hotel, and if everybody is looking for bed bugs there is greater chance that you will discover them quickly. Also keep in mind that guests are not the only people capable of bringing bed bugs into your facility.

Where do you get bed bug identification training? You may already have a contract pest management company that is very familiar with bed bugs, so they can train your employees. If your current company is inexperienced in bed bug management, hire an experienced company immediately. Ask your new bed bug experts to provide your employees with bed bug identification training. The training will cost you, but the expense will be immediately recovered when your employees find a bed bug before your guests do. Have your pest management company give advanced bed bug inspection trainings to selected members of your hospitality or facilities staff. The pest management company can help your selected bed bug staff to draft a monthly inspection plan for the facility, so that your employees actively scout guest rooms for bed bugs on a regular basis.

Housekeeping personnel who know what bed bugs and their fecal stains look like can then alert your bed bug inspectors immediately if they think they see bed bug evidence in a hotel room. This early detection will help to identify infestations before they get started. The trained bed bug staff members can also serve as handy inspectors if a guest complains about bites or bed bugs in their room.





## Canine Scent Detection

Another proactive approach to bed bug detection is to have your rooms inspected at regular intervals by a bed bug sniffing dog. While some dogs (and their handlers) are better than others, any dog that has been trained correctly is far better at detecting bed bugs than a human. The dogs that have been trained to detect bed bugs are specifically trained to detect only live bed bugs (they do not respond to dead infestations) and even single bed bug eggs. One distinct advantage to having a hotel inspected by a dog is that a bed bug dog can check rooms very quickly. Where it might take two pest management professionals an hour and a half to thoroughly inspect a hotel room, a dog could complete the inspection in about 2 minutes. Canine scent detection is an excellent way to inspect hotels with hundreds of rooms. A dog could check a certain number of rooms on weekly or monthly basis, potentially catching bed bug infestations in the very early stages.

The disadvantage of canine scent detection is that the dogs cost about \$10,000 a piece, so there are only a few dogs to go around. Most pest management companies do not own dogs themselves (although some do), but they sub-contract with bed bug dog handlers. Keep in mind that not all dogs are 100% accurate (but usually above 90% accurate), so the dog handler must also be well trained. The handler is responsible for confirming bed bug presence when the dog gives a positive signal.

## When a Guest Complains about Bed Bugs

Have policy in place regarding on how reception or housekeeping personnel are to handle bed bug complaints. With all of the bed bug lawsuits focused on hotels over the last decade, relying on your employees to come up with a satisfactory on-the-spot response to a bed bug complaint is simply too risky. Develop a response protocol where another room or compensation is offered along with a specifically worded apology. Have your trained bed bug inspectors check the room immediately. Document the guest's complaint, your response to the complaint, and your inspection results. If bed bugs are found call your pest management company immediately.

## When You Suspect a Guest Room is Infested

Bed bugs have a cryptic lifestyle, which means they like to hide. Because they are so good at hiding, an infestation might go undetected for several weeks or months before you receive your first complaint. After you receive a complaint, and your in-house inspectors either find bed bug evidence, or they don't, what do you do?

1. Take the room out of service, but do not move anything in or out of the room until it can be inspected by your contract pest management company.
2. If your contract pest management company finds no bed bug evidence, evaluate the original complaint. Did the guest bring a bed bug to the front desk, or did they complain about bites? Use the evidence presented by the guest to decide if the room should be treated or not. Record the complaint, the result of the inspection, and your treatment decision.

3. If bed bugs evidence is found by your pest management, a thorough inspection of the room is required to determine where bed bugs are harboring.
4. The headboard is a favorite bed bug harborage so it should be removed from the wall for inspection and treatment. Your maintenance employees may have to remove the headboard if it is large and bolted to the wall.
5. The entire bed area must be inspected, including the interior of the boxsprings.
6. If the bed is going to remain in the room, the mattress and boxsprings must be treated (see the fact sheets regarding chemical and non-chemical treatment methods) and sealed in a high quality mattress encasement.
7. If you cannot afford the expense of encasing both the mattress and the boxsprings, the boxsprings must be placed inside an encasement.
8. If the mattress, boxsprings, or other infested furniture are to be disposed of, the furniture needs to be lightly treated with insecticide on the exterior surfaces, and bagged before being transported out of the room. This is so that no bed bugs fall off the furniture infesting the hall or hotel service elevator.
9. After all unwanted furniture is disposed of, the pest management professionals will inspect and treat all of the remaining furniture, telephones, closets, baseboards, carpet tacks, electrical outlets, crack and crevices using a combination of non-chemical methods and insecticides labeled for those locations.
10. All discarded furniture left outside the facility should be slashed, marked, or in some way damaged to keep people from removing it from the trash heap and taking it home.
11. The treated room should be inspected again after 48 hours to determine if there are any surviving bed bugs. If live bed bugs are found, the room should remain empty and be inspected again at 72 hours.
12. The room should also be inspected and treated again after 14 days and 28 days, so that any remaining eggs have had time to hatch.
13. Keep in mind that many bed bug populations are resistant to insecticides used for their control, so a low level infestation that survives a treatment may go undetected during a visual inspection. It is for this reason the pest control companies do not guarantee that the bed bugs are gone even if they no longer find bugs during an inspection.



14. If a single room becomes a reoccurring problem but no bed bugs are found, a scent detection dog may be required to locate the problem.

## Adjacent Rooms

If bed bugs are found in a guest room, it is extremely important that surrounding units (on either side, above and below) be inspected for bed bugs also. A recent study conducted in 750 hotels found that rooms sharing a wall with an infested room also had bed bugs about 20 percent of the time\*. Rooms above and below the infested room had bed bugs between 5-7 percent of the time.

Bed bugs can easily move through walls to adjacent rooms. They might be motivated to move if one room is occupied and the other is not. We do not understand enough about bed bug behavior to predict if or when bed bugs might move into another room. But there is certainly evidence that they will move from one room to another. It is for this reason that rooms sharing a common wall with a bed bug infested room must be inspected. In some cases, you will discover that the adjacent room is the source of the infestation even though there have not been any complaints (yet).

## Employee Areas

Hotel guests are not the only possible sources of bed bug infestation. Certainly, if the hotel has many employees each of those individuals has the potential to bring bed bugs into the facility. Employee locker rooms, rest rooms, break rooms and other locations where employees might store their personal belongings are vulnerable to bed bug infestations.

Once your employees have been trained to identify bed bug evidence, let them know that to protect themselves from infestation, they should immediately report any bed bugs found in employee areas. Some employees may be reluctant to report bed bugs, particularly if they feel that it might get another employee into trouble. Therefore, it best to set up an anonymous reporting system where an employee can inform the management of the time and location of a bed bug sighting without revealing their name. This will allow your in-house inspectors to investigate the situation and hopefully detect the problem before it begins to spread.

## Important Note

It is extremely important that no hotel employee ever attempt to treat bed bugs themselves. Making pesticide applications in a hotel when you are not a certified applicator is a lawsuit waiting to happen. Also, attempting to treat bed bugs when you have no experience will interfere with your pest management company's treatment plan and potentially increase the bed bug problem. Always have bed bug infestations treated by an experienced pest management company. If your current company does not have bed bug experience, have them recommend a sub-contractor who does.

\*Cooper Pest Solutions, Lawrenceville, New Jersey

