Travel Tips

Keep Your Belongings Safe from Bed Bugs this Holiday Season

During the hustle and bustle of the holidays, sometimes common sense goes right out the window. If you are staying in a hotel or new place, do your best to protect yourself from bed bugs. There are a few simple precautions that can significantly decrease the likelihood that you will bring those dreaded blood-suckers home with you. When you first enter your room, place your luggage either in the shower/tub (make sure that the surface is dry first!) or on a freestanding table away from the bed. While your luggage is in one of these safer places, inspect the bed while paying extra attention to the region closer to where you will lay your head. Pull up blankets and sheets so you can examine the ridges of the mattress. You are looking primarily for dark brown fecal spotting, as well as live bed bugs. Examine behind the headboard if possible, though in many hotels it is anchored to the wall. If you do find what you think is evidence, call the front desk and alert them to the issue.

Bed bugs are not well-equipped to handle heat, so putting dryer-safe items in the dryer for a few minutes when you return home is an extra step towards your protection. If you are concerned about bed bugs or would like to know more about them and how we can help, let us know we will be happy to assist you!

Put your suitcase in the bathtub, shower or on a table while you check for bed bugs, NOT on the bed!

Overwintering Pests

As temperatures drop during the autumn months, many insects seek shelter inside homes as the weather cools. These overwintering pests do not feed or reproduce during the winter months, but they may emerge on warm days throughout the winter and can be a nuisance.

Cluster flies are large black flies that are often seen bumbling around windows on sunny winter days trying to get outside. They look similar to common houseflies, but have larger, darker bodies. Boxelder bugs are black with red markings and red eyes. Boxelder bugs feed on many different plants, but are especially attracted to the boxelder maple or the ash-leaved maple. They are sometimes seen clustering on the south side of buildings in the autumn. Although they don’t feed or breed indoors, they can leave a stain when crushed, so take care if you find them indoors.

The brown marmorated stinkbug moves into structures in the autumn as the weather cools. In addition to being a nuisance pest in structures, this stink bug has become an agricultural threat, causing severe damage to apple and other tree fruits. The multicolored Asian lady beetle can range in color from yellow-orange to red. Spots may or may not be present. It is a beneficial predator of aphids and scale insects.

Overwintering pests are considered nuisances but in many cases, the sheer number of individuals may make them unbearable. If you find overwintering pests like these, contact us so we can help you stop them from entering your home or business.

What’s Hiding in Your Firewood?

Firewood Considerations and Pests

Now that we are in the throes of winter, I don’t have to tell you that the weather has turned cold. The allure of a wood-burning fireplace holds a special place during this icy time of year. While the crackling heat firewood provides is certainly a welcome benefit, there can be some hitchhikers that sneak their way inside your home on it. If you are alert and observant, you can help reduce the likelihood of this happening.

A variety of insects, arachnids, and other arthropods like to live in, on, and around stacked firewood. All pests are unwelcome, but they pose different threat levels to you and your home. Among continued on page 2

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**Firewood** (continued from page 1)

the harmless (though undesired) ones are the pillbugs, sowbugs, daddy-longlegs, spider, earwigs, and springtails. While they may not damage property or be a threat to human health, let us know if you are finding them indoors and we will take care of them.

The most problematic invaders are the carpenter ants and wood-boring beetles because both of these have life cycles that require damaging wood. However, due to the social nature of carpenter ants, you are very unlikely to introduce an infestation into your home. Wood-boring beetles do not function like that, and as such, wood containing beetle larvae are a more serious threat. The timing of a larva’s emergence from wood depends on several factors and is not easy to predict. If you have wood flooring, wood trim, or wooden furniture and you notice holes or sawdust around, you may have a wood-boring beetle or carpenter ant infestation.

There are several ways you can help reduce the likelihood of importing pest problems. If you have your own firewood supply outdoors, it’s best to stack it away from your house to discourage any of these creatures from wandering the short distance indoors for heat and shelter. Before bringing in firewood, make sure there are not bird or other animal nests on or near it. These nests can harbor mites, ticks, and fleas that you most definitely do not want to be introducing into your home! Keeping your firewood tightly wrapped and covered can help reduce the chances that your wood will contact any of those nasty critters. When you are ready to bring wood in, make sure to brush soil and debris off of it first and use firewood very soon after you bring it indoors. The shorter the amount of time it is sitting inside, the less likely any pests will start moving off of it and into the recesses of your home.

It’s also important to remember that it is never advisable to transport firewood great distances or move it across state lines. The spread of invasive insects is rapidly expanding and is greatly aided by the movement of firewood. By taking these steps, you will be much less likely to introduce a pest problem into your home this winter, however, if anything does show up, please let us know and we will take care of it.

**Indian Meal Moth**

No grain or grain-containing product is safe when the Indian meal moth is around! The longhorned, pale to yellow (though color can depend on diet) caterpillars of this species are significant troublemakers. They are about a quarter of an inch in length and have sparse hairs sticking straight out from their body. Caterpillars are usually found in and around their food sources which include pet food, dried fruits, chocolate, candy, corn meal, powdered milk, cereal, dried peppers, and many more items. In addition to eating your food, these caterpillars will spoil it by leaving a mess of silky webbing where they’ve been feeding.

The wings of adult moths are fringed at the tips and are half pale and half reddish-brown with a coppery huster. Adults have a wingspan of about ½”, are attracted to lights, and at rest, the body slopes downward from the head to the tip of the abdomen. You don’t want to take any chances when these moths are around, a single female can lay up to 400 eggs! Unfortunately, it isn’t always as simple as throwing out infested materials because caterpillars travel away from their food in order to pupate, so an infestation gets quickly get reestablished. Alert us if you suspect Indian meal moths, or their often confused counterparts (clothes moths), are in your home and we will investigate and get to the bottom of it.

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**Carpet Beetles**

Winter is the time of year when insects fade away from your thoughts; you’re no longer bombarded by mosquitoes, harassed by flies, or graced by the beauty of a passing butterfly. During this quiet, reflective time you are bound to spend more time indoors and while doing so, you might notice little holes or damage to natural fibers like wool, leather, carpet, fur, and more. To make matters worse, damaged goods can extend to include spices, corn, flour, and grains. Once you notice a little damage, you might quickly notice a lot! The most likely culprit is the aptly named carpet beetle.

Several species in the family Dermestidae are called carpet beetles (black carpet beetle, varied carpet beetle, furniture carpet beetle), and they have similar biology, behavior, and destructive capabilities. It is in fact the larval stage that causes all the damage, adults prefer to be outdoors feeding on the nectar and pollen of flowering plants (though they don’t always find their way outside).

Damaged materials often have several small holes concentrated in a single area, but this isn’t always the case. Only natural fibers are attacked, purely synthetic fibers are left alone since the larvae can’t extract nutrition from them. In addition to damaged fibers and finding live larvae or adults, the cast-off skins of larvae are another indication of their presence. Cast-skins are small, curled-up, bristled, and shell-like items left behind when a larva molts. Larvae prefer to feed in dark and quiet places, so cast skins and damage are more likely to be found in those locations.

The black carpet beetle and varied carpet beetle are the most common of these pests in the United States. The black carpet beetle, Attagenus unicolor, is a dark brown to black and reaches a maximum size of 1/4” in length. Larvae are 1/2” or less in length and quite skinny. Their most distinctive characteristic is a tuft of hairs that extends out from their abdomen. The varied carpet beetle, Anthrenus verbasci, is about half the size of the black carpet beetle and has an interesting and irregular pattern of white, yellow/orange, and brown scales. Varied carpet beetle larvae are oval-shaped at 1/3” or less in length, and are characterized by having long, bristly hairs covering much of the body.

Carpet beetles are perhaps the insects most commonly confused with bed bugs. The reason for this is two-fold. First, the places where carpet beetles are found can be similar to bed bugs, and second, carpet beetles are small and have a sort of similar shape (especially to people that have never been face-to-face with a bed bug). Bed bugs have a flattened appearance (unless they are full of blood), while carpet beetles are much rounder in shape. To simplify matters, just give us a call if you are finding either of these pests, or have reason to suspect that they may be living in your home. We will provide a correct identification and immediately begin fixing whatever the problem may be.