

Asian Hospitality



The View From Here

MUKESH MOWJI, TARUN PATEL AND ROBERT ASTUDILLO OF PRACREA INC. AND SUBSIDIARY AQQIRE CHART SHIFTS IN COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT IN THE U.S.



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Bad *Bed Bug* Behavior

Hotels ultimately pay for failure to prevent infestations

Most hotel owners and operators are proud when their property is listed on global travel sites. But one website an owner wants to avoid is the Bed Bug Registry, where guests report hotels and motels that they claim have bed bugs.

Although the microscopic-size insects do not transmit pathogens, most people consider bed bugs disgusting. But what the public finds even more repulsive is the feeling that hotels do not care about the welfare of their guests.

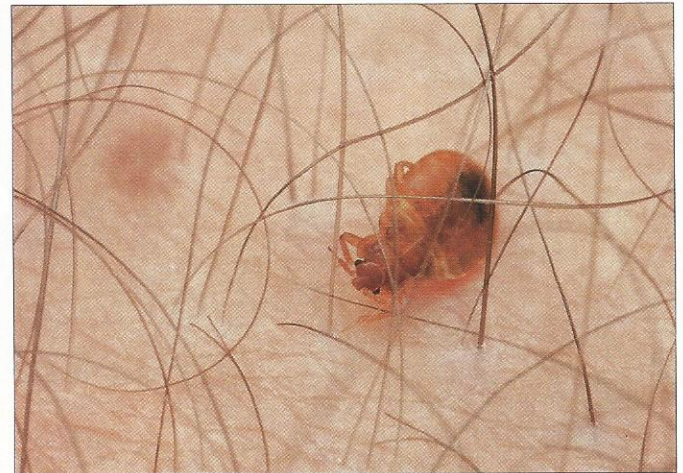
Rodger Williams, general manager of Applied Science Labs, a bed bug control company based in Dallas, Texas, said when a jury awards a bitten guest huge sums of money it's usually because the evidence overwhelmingly proves the hotel did not do enough to completely alleviate the infestation before selling the room.

"The common thread in bed bug awards is jurors felt the hospitality business did not care," he said. "You know it's true because bed bugs, while creepy, are mostly an inconvenience for guests. If a hotel puts guests into a room that the staff knew was infested, that action speaks louder than words."

In a 2009 case in Glendale, California, a lawyer representing three women who shared a room at an economy hotel told the local newspaper, "We feel the bed bugs have been there for a while. They knew about the bed bugs, but they continued to rent out the room."

Bed bugs do not carry disease, but in some extreme cases bites can lead to other health issues such as infections and allergic reactions such as welts. Typical reaction to bed bug bites is the appearance of red, itchy spots that emerge several days after an attack. And not everyone reacts to a bed bug bite.

Guests who seek legal recompense for bed bug bites typically cite anxiety, emotional distress, sleeplessness, physical disfigurement, ruined clothing and luggage, costs occurred because they brought bed bugs home



Bed bugs can be difficult to detect and treat because of their small size and ability to survive up to a year without feeding, said Orkin LLC. They are about the size of an apple seed when fully grown. In this image, a bed bug rests on a hand.

and lost wages, reports *Bed Bugs Handbook*. Hotels have even accused of battery, fraud and negligence.

Settlements range from \$382,000 in 2003 with a major hotel chain to \$100,000 in 2015 at a single hotel. Other suits have sought millions of dollars in damages.

In 2004, a full-service hotel in San Francisco settled out of court with a guest for \$71,000 after she was bitten 400 times and ultimately developed a chronic skin condition.

A once-and-done treatment is not enough to solve a bed bug problem, Williams said. "Bed bug eggs hatch 10 to 14 days after the first infestation, and that population is 50 percent larger than the previous group." Keep in mind, when a hotel initially treats a reported infestation, 60 percent of the eggs have not yet hatched.

To say your hotel reacted to a bed bug report by treating the room is not enough to convince a guest – or a jury – that you care, Williams said. "It used to be all about response, but now it's about prevention."

It does not matter whether your hotel is a five-star or two-star establishment, bed bugs are not choosy about their accommodations.

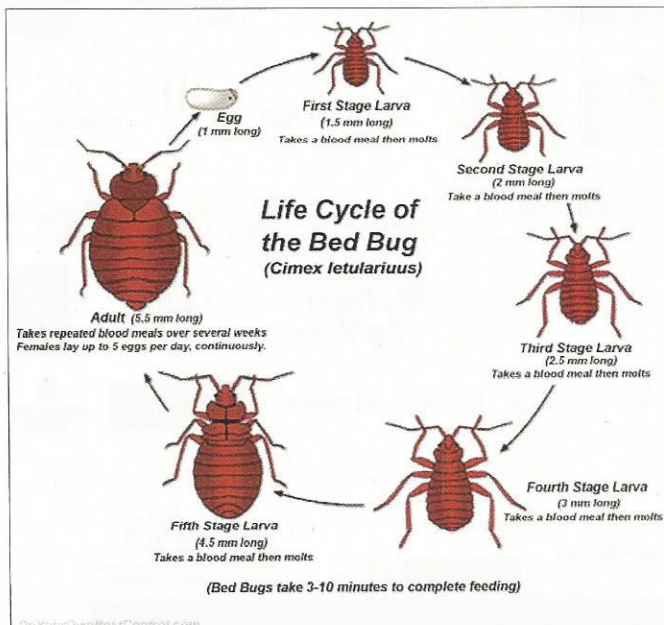
"We have more people affected by bed bugs in the United States now than ever before," said Ron Harrison, an entomologist and director of technical services with Orkin LLC. "They were virtually unheard of in the U.S. 10 years ago."

According to a 2015 survey by the National Pest Management Association, nearly all (99.6 percent) of pest professionals nationwide have treated bed bugs in the past year, up from five, 10 and 15 years ago.

A hotel needs proof that it cared about the welfare of its guests not only at the time of infestation, but also in advance and in the aftermath, said Williams. He recommends hotels practice preventative maintenance to ward off bed bugs and lawsuits.

Applied Science provides documentation that a room has been treated with preventative chemicals. It also adds a third-party certification from the American Academy of Entomological Science.

Applied Science's remedy is non-toxic to humans and animals. A



This graphic demonstrates the life cycle of a bed bug.

single treatment lasts 12 months. The company's solution was tested by the American Academy of Entomological Science, which placed live bed bugs and several nymphs in a room that was treated 12 months earlier. The insects all died, the nymphs within four hours and the adults by the morning, according to study by Jeffrey Brown, a doctor of entomology. In a control room without treatment, the bugs survived. The researchers used Applied Science's "knock down" spray and those insects died in 25 seconds.

"For 20 percent of the cost to treat an infestation in one room, a hotel can protect 50 rooms against bed bugs for a year," Williams said. "It really is true that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Bed bugs can be difficult to detect and treat because of their small size and ability to survive up to a year without feeding, said Orkin. They are about the size of an apple seed when fully grown, and can hide around seams of a mattress, behind headboards and in cracks and crevices, usually within a five-foot radius of the bed.

"The common thread in bed bug awards is jurors felt the hospitality business did not care."

RODGER WILLIAMS, APPLIED SCIENCE LABS

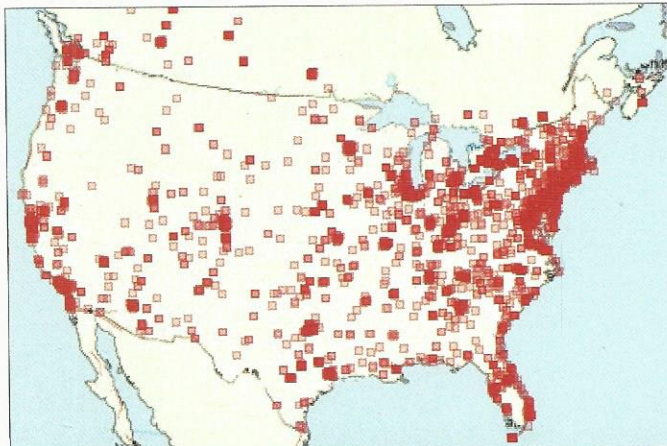
The first signs of a bed bug infestation are often the bed bugs themselves or small dark stains bed bugs can leave behind.

Ironically, it's guests who bring the bed bugs to the hotel – in their luggage, on their clothing and their shoes. Tim Husen, an entomologist and technical services manager with Orkin, calls bed bugs the "ultimate hitch hikers." They not only live in hotels, but also in homes, cars, the gym and movie theaters.

In 2010, a Michigan couple sued a luxury hotel in New York City, claiming they spent \$8,000 to eradicate bed bugs from their clothing and home after bringing the insects home from the hotel.

For the past six years, Orkin LLC has released an annual list of cities where it has performed the most bed bug treatments in homes and commercial buildings. January's Top 50 Bed Bug Cities for the first time ranked Baltimore as number one. Four metro regions — Las Vegas, Portland, Salt Lake City and Greensboro-High Point-Winston Salem — made the list for the first time this year.

Husen said making the list is a good thing because it means Orkin was



A map on the Bed Bug Registry, a website, identifies hotels where previous guests claim their room had bed bugs. Founded in 2006, the site has collected about 20,000 reports covering 12,000 locations in the U.S. and Canada.



A bed bug bite is a skin puncture. Some people have an allergic reaction to the fluids injected by the bed bug while others do not. The allergic reaction to the bite can be small such as some skin redness or small bumps to more severe reactions such as skin blisters, reports Bed Bug Handbook.

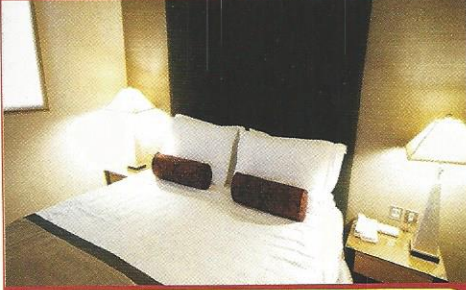



busy treating bed bug infestations. "It shows increased awareness and that people sought professional help."

Husen advises against hoteliers taking a bed bug problem into their own hands. Professional pest control companies provide the best protection against bed bugs. "Routine maintenance is your best protection," Husen said. "Licensed pros abide by the rules, they understand and know how to use chemicals and equipment and they know how to time treatment."

Orkin also educates hotel staff on what to look for identifying pest issues. "It's a very big component of our program," Husen said. "Employees such as housekeepers are in the rooms every day."

"Thoroughness, effectiveness and safety are three good terms to use in bed bug treatment and prevention." ■

BED BUGS?

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