Flesh Flies

(Flesh Fly – family Sarcophagidae)



Flesh fly (adult), with three dark stripes



Large red eyes and checkered abdomen

Identification – Flesh flies look like a bigger, heavier house fly, about 3/8 to 1/2 inch long. They're gray, with three dark stripes on the thorax and a gray-and-black checkerboard pattern on the abdomen. They have large red eyes, and many have a red tip at the end of the abdomen. They are not shiny metallic blue or green, which is how you tell them from blow flies.

Biology – Unlike most flies, flesh flies don't lay eggs. The eggs hatch inside the female, and she deposits live maggots on the food source. They breed in carrion, such as a dead animal in a wall, attic, chimney or HVAC unit, and sometimes in dog feces or garbage. The maggots feed for several days, then leave to pupate in a drier spot nearby.

Why they're a problem – Indoors, a sudden bunch of flesh flies almost always means a dead animal nearby. They don't bite and they don't damage the building, but they can carry bacteria from the carcass or waste they bred in. The flies are a nuisance. The carcass is the real problem, including the odor.

What we find – A sudden group of large gray flies, often dead on the window sills of one room, usually traces back to a dead animal in a wall, ceiling, chimney or nearby air handler. In an office or other commercial building, the source may be a dead animal in a rooftop air-handling unit over that room. You may also find them where a mouse has died in a wall after a poisoning, or around garbage that has sat too long.

What works – **Find and remove the source.** Spraying the adults alone won't fix it while the carcass is still there. Once the animal is removed, clean and disinfect the area and vacuum up any maggots or pupae around it. Expect a few more flies to emerge for a week or two afterward, from pupae that already left the carcass. Insect light traps work well for catching the adults, especially in commercial buildings and offices.

What you can do – Look and smell for the source, starting in the room where the flies are showing up. Check the attic, crawl space, chimney, air handler and any wall or ceiling voids nearby. If you find a carcass, have it removed and the area cleaned. If it's in an air handler, have the unit shut down first. Vacuum up the flies as they appear, and empty the vacuum outside. Keep lids tight on trash cans, and pick up dog waste regularly so it isn't a second breeding site. Repair torn screens and keep doors closed.

When to call Dynamic – Give us a call if large gray flies suddenly show up in one room, especially if there's a dead-animal smell, or if you can't find the source. We can help track it down and deal with the flies that keep emerging after the carcass is gone. And if you're not sure whether it's a flesh fly, a blow fly or a cluster fly, send us a photo and we'll identify it for you.