Cluster Flies

(Cluster Fly – *Pollenia* spp., mainly *Pollenia rudis*)



Cluster fly (adult), with golden hairs



At rest, wings overlap like closed scissors

Identification – Cluster flies look like a slightly bigger, slower house fly, about 3/8 inch long. They're dark gray with short golden hairs on the back, and at rest they fold their wings flat over the back, one on top of the other. They're sluggish and easy to swat, usually buzzing at a sunny window. Crush one and it leaves a greasy spot and a sweet smell, like buckwheat honey.

Biology – Cluster flies breed outdoors, not in your house. They lay their eggs in the soil, and the maggots live as parasites inside earthworms. As the days get shorter in late summer and fall, the adults gather on the sunny south and west sides of buildings and crawl in through gaps under siding, around windows, under eaves and through attic vents. They spend the winter in attics and wall voids, and they often pick the same house year after year.

Why they're a problem – They're a nuisance, nothing more. They don't bite, don't damage the house and don't breed indoors. The trouble is the numbers: hundreds can come out of the walls over a winter. And if a mass of them dies inside a wall or attic, the bodies can feed carpet beetles and other scavengers, which is a worse problem than the flies.

What we find – Cluster flies, ladybugs, stink bugs and some wasps all move into houses in the fall to "sleep" for the winter. On sunny winter days, or when the heat comes on, they wake up thinking it's spring and head for the light at windows and light fixtures. In their weakened state they have very little time to get out, so most die on the window sills or in enclosed light fixtures. Expect another wave in spring as they try to leave.

What works – **Keep them out in late summer.** Once they're inside the walls, control measures are usually futile, and we don't recommend treating the walls or attic because of the dead-fly problem above. It's better to let them run their course and clean up the dead ones as they come out. Because they head straight for light, insect light traps—especially in commercial buildings and offices—work well for quietly catching the flies that make it into living or working spaces. For houses that get them every year, a professional treatment of the sunny exterior walls and entry points, timed for late August or early September, can cut down the numbers. Be realistic, though: it reduces them, it doesn't eliminate them.

What you can do – Vacuum them up as they appear instead of swatting them on the walls, and empty the vacuum outside. Seal the cracks they come out of, like window and door trim, baseboards, light fixtures and outlets. In summer, before they move in, caulk gaps around windows, doors, pipes and siding outside, and repair window and vent screens.

When to call Dynamic – If you get large numbers every year, call us in the summer so we can plan the sealing and time an exterior treatment before they move in. And if you're not sure whether it's a cluster fly or a house fly breeding somewhere inside, send us a photo and we'll identify it for you.