

Bed Bugs

Even Superman Can't See Through Lead

Some simple precautions can help technicians avoid inadvertently transporting bed bugs to other accounts — or worse, home with them.

By Paul J. Bello • Contributor

Many years ago, as comic book-reading kids, we all learned that even Superman had some shortcomings: He couldn't see through lead and fell victim to Kryptonite, despite being bulletproof. Today, we have excellent service technicians who have learned the hard way that they are not bed bug-proof — and reports of techs bringing bed bugs back from work to their own homes are increasing. Worse yet, there's a distinct (although as yet undocumented) possibility that service technicians might be responsible for inadvertently carrying bed bugs from an infested account to a non-bed bug account.

To adequately mitigate this "cross-contamination" concern, we need to adopt a preventative mindset where we consider the various methods or paths that might result in such a situation.

Dress for Success

Perhaps we should start with the bed bug technician's uniform. At the risk of looking like an ice cream man, my preference is to wear all white when working at a bed bug location — including white socks, white briefs, white carpenter/painter pants, white shirt and white sneakers.

Recently, I was working on a project within a sizable bed bug-infested

arena at a research facility when I looked down and noticed a bed bug crawling on my right sneaker. At that, it was immediately evident to me that it would be easy for a bed bug to hide in any of the many possible locations found on a cross-trainer type athletic shoe. As such, it is likely wiser to limit our footwear to those shoes that are built more simply because they are smoother and offer less hiding places for bed bugs. You could also simply use Tyvek-type shoe covers.

Whether you wish to wear painter's pants, medical scrubs or disposable Tyvek-type suits is up to you; however, it's much easier to see a pest crawling on your white or light-colored clothing than it will be to notice one on a darker-colored garment.

I also recommend that each bed bug service technician is equipped with at least one complete change of clothing — and perhaps more, depending upon how many accounts are being visited. A suitable container or plastic bag for storing the clean clothing, and another for the bed bug suspect or dirty clothing, should also be used.

Policies and procedures should be in place to adequately address the possibility of cross-contamination between accounts. Such procedures

also will be applicable in preventing technicians from bringing bed bugs home from work. Changing clothes every time, regardless of whether they're suspected of harboring bed bugs, should be useful in preventing the transporting of bed bugs from location to location.

When work has been completed at an infested location, the technician might change clothes and seal the bed bug suspected clothing in a suitable plastic storage box or plastic bag. Sealable plastic containers that bed bugs cannot climb would be best. An additional level of control might be achieved by placing a dichlorvos (DDVP) strip within the sealed container. Heat may also be applied to such containers by placing them in full sunlight or another suitable heat source.

After observing bed bug infestations, none of us wish to bring them home or have to do bed bug control in our own homes. Perhaps it's only because luck is on my side, but I do take precautions every time I leave an infested location:

- Stand in one plastic bag and remove clothes by placing the suspect clothes into another plastic bag.
- Seal the suspect clothing in the plastic bag.

When working at a bed bug-infested account, it's a good idea to place your tool kit in a bed bug-proof plastic bag. In addition to this, place a pest strip within the tool kit to prevent bed bug intrusion.



- Dress in a fresh set of clothes.
- Once back at the office (if you have on-site laundry) or at home, place all suspect clothes in the wash.
- Seal shoes, belt and other non-laundry items in a plastic bag with a DDVP strip and place in direct sunlight or heat with a suitable heater.



Wearing light-colored clothing can help you detect if bed bugs have inadvertently gotten on you during work. Here, the author inspects for bed bugs wearing a light-colored shirt, slacks, socks and shoes.

Dress in white or light-colored clothing, which will allow for easier detection of hitchhiking bed bugs. You should also have a complete change of clothing on hand to prevent accidentally transporting them to the next account.

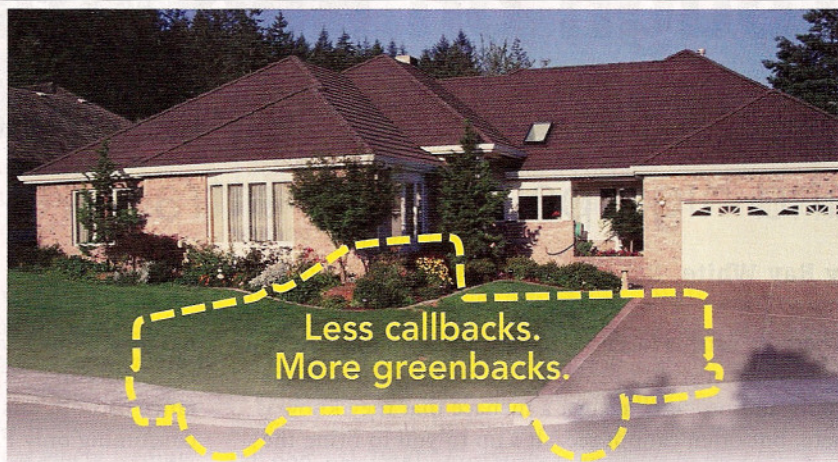
Protect Your Tools

We also need to be careful with how we store and use our equipment when working in bed bug-infested locations. My preference is to place my tool kit in a white plastic trash bag. I place a DDVP strip within the tool kit as well, to add an additional level of protection. A supply of large white plastic trash bags is also on hand for use as needed.

The methods listed in this article are only suggestions, of course. But the underlying concerns are real, as many entomologists, including Dr. Phil Koehler of the University of Florida, Dr. Dini Miller of Virginia Tech — both of whom encouraged me to bring this topic to light by writing an article — have received calls from pest management professionals about dealing with cross-contamination. We agree that all it takes is one visit to a severe bed bug infestation to underscore and emphasize the need for such preventative methodologies.

And while we might often think of our technicians as superheroes, we know no matter how careful they are, none of them are bed bug-proof. It's wise to put some procedures in place to help our technicians avoid their own problems with bed bugs. **PMP**

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