

■ Exposure to Bed Bugs on the Job



BED BUGS HAVE BECOME a much larger problem in the past five years. Due in part to increased travel and in changes in the use of pesticides, there is a huge increase in reports of bed bugs. In the first six months of 2008, nearly 9,000 bed bug complaints were registered with the New York City Housing Preservation and Development (HPD).

■ WHAT ARE BED BUGS?

Bed bugs are small insects that are about the size of an apple seed. They are flat and are usually rust-colored. After they have fed on human blood, they become brighter red and look a bit swollen. (Bed bugs like to eat every few days, but they can live up to 18 months without another meal!)

Bed bug bites are annoying, but they have not been found to carry disease.



■ HOW CAN LOCAL 237 MEMBERS BE EXPOSED TO BED BUGS ON THE JOB?

Many Local 237 members come into close contact with the general public, both in residential sites like NYCHA developments and during the course of the day at schools, hospitals, shelters and other public locations. Bed bugs can be anywhere. They are not a sign of being dirty.

Bed bugs keep still most of the time. They are most active at night and do not like light. But, if there are bed bugs in your workplace, they can get onto your clothes, purse or other items you bring to work. You can easily bring them home without knowing it.

■ WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT BED BUGS ARE AROUND?

You may see the bed bugs themselves. Even though they are small (about the size of an apple seed), they are visible. You may also see small blood stains from crushed bugs or dark spots from their waste. But bed bugs are often hard to see because they hide in furniture and in cracks.

■ ARE BED BUGS HARMFUL?

Bed bugs are annoying, but they are not known to carry disease. If you get bitten, the bites may become large and itchy. Try not to scratch the bites. Using calamine lotion can help keep the itching under control.

■ HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM BRINGING BED BUGS HOME?

At the work location:

- Hang your bag and coat from a door knob or hook; keep your personal items off of the floor.
- Keep a change of clothing at work if you believe you may be exposed to bed bugs. Try not to wear work clothing home, in your car, or on the train if you believe you may have been exposed to bed bugs.
- When you change your clothing, put your work clothes in a plastic bag.
- Avoid wearing pants with cuffs.
- Cover your skin (no open toe shoes or shorts) and tuck your pant legs into your socks.
- If you must go into an apartment you

believe has bed bugs, try to schedule the visit for the end of the day. This will allow you to immediately decontaminate and change your clothes. It will also help you prevent the spread of bugs from one location to the next.



4. Vacuum (with HEPA filters) areas where there has been evidence of bed bugs.
5. Seal cracks and crevices with silicone-based sealant in areas suspected of having a bed bug problem.
6. Hot laundering of clothes that have been exposed to bed bugs.

If bed bugs have invaded a workplace, professional exterminators should be called in to apply insecticides. The area should be re-inspected approximately 2-3 weeks after the pesticides have been used.

If you suspect bed bugs are in your workplace and management is not taking the steps they should, call the union for assistance.

Once you are home:

- Remove your clothing immediately and put in a separate tied bag and keep it separate from the general laundry.
- Wash your clothing in hot water and then dry it for 20 minutes in on a hot setting.

HOW CAN WE GET RID OF BEDBUGS ON THE JOB?

Your employer has an obligation to maintain “as far as reasonably practicable” a program to “prevent the entrance or harborage of insects.” PESH 29 CFR 1910.141(a)(5)

That means that the law says your employer must have a good clean-up and extermination program if you have bedbugs in your workplace. According to PESH, employers should:

1. Educate workers on what they can do to prevent bedbugs or get rid of bed bugs.
2. Monitor and inspect areas where bed bugs may be hiding.
3. Remove clutter.



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WHAT THE LAW REQUIRES

There is no specific PESH standard on bed bugs. The housekeeping/sanitation standard may apply: 1910.141

