



Isolating beds to prevent bites

No bed is an island ... or is it?

Paul Bello Contributor

One major factor that makes bed bugs different than other pests is that if we don't get all of them when we service the account, they bite customers. It's not like cockroaches or ants where some customers won't complain about any post-treatment sightings. However, customers will most definitely complain about post-treatment bitings. Bed bugs are raising the bar for our entire pest management industry and related sectors. They are, in effect, making us better at what we do.

A typical bed bug scenario: A customer is bitten over a period of time before realizing the problem is bed bugs. This delayed period of non-confirmed bed bug activity can vary for a number of reasons and is sometimes surprisingly long. For example, there was once a woman who reported

that her "skin related" symptoms had gone on for more than thirty months before it was finally confirmed by a pest management professional (PMP) that she had a bed bug problem in her home. Certainly this is a long period of time but it's not unusual to hear of similar cases. In dealing with bed bugs we've learned and observed that the general public is not educated in all things bed bugs and that it is common for them to miss the telltale signs of bed bug activity. It simply takes time for untrained folks to connect the dots.

When we arrive at a bed bug account we'll encounter various levels of infestation. Bed bug ground zeros make for great photo opportunities and interesting "extreme case" stories, however, it's the low-level infestations that often provide unique challenges, primarily because at these locations bed bugs may be more difficult to find



Special isolation tents can be employed to prevent a client from coming in direct contact with the bed's mattress.

and remediate. In any case, no matter what the level of infestation, one thing is for sure: The people who live there are being bitten by bed bugs and it's up to you to save them.

Just how we save them and what we do may vary by bed bug professional and company. There are many viable methodologies and techniques that may be successfully utilized to remediate a bed bug situation. However, the immediacy in which we are able to remove or eliminate the possibility of bite occurrence is of prime importance to those who will be sleeping in the bed bug-infested location that night. How can we prevent people from being bitten by bed bugs on Treatment Day One?

Nearly all of the locations I visit are of the extreme bed bug ground-zero type, where bed bugs are everywhere and the resident already has numerous bites. How can we provide immediate psychological relief?

First, isolate the bed and alter the existing conditions to prevent bed bugs from accessing the bed and biting the sleeping victim.

The concept of bed isolation is not new or unique. Reference literature indicates that this has been a home remedy for bed bugs for many years. In the good old days, folks would place bowls or cans of various liquids under the legs of their beds in an effort to keep bed bugs at bay. Liquids used included turpentine, kerosene, soapy water, oil and other materials. Grease and petroleum jelly have been used as well. An experienced bed bug victim once told us of how they treated for bed bugs in "his country," using diesel fuel as an application product.

With the recent bed bug resurgence, our industry has seen that necessity truly is the mother of invention. Various bed bug blocker devices have been developed and marketed to PMPs and consumers. These devices may be used

to help isolate a bed and prevent bed bug biting.

When isolating a bed we're attempting to make the bed inaccessible to bed bugs so they can't access the sleeping host. To do this, we must first inspect and treat the bed thoroughly to ensure there are no bed bugs present on the bed itself. While this requires significant effort, it is possible. Once the entire bed has been rendered bed bug free, you should begin to place the isolation devices and employ isolation methodologies.

As part of the isolation process we need to install high-quality bed bug-proof encasements over the mattress and box spring. Doing so takes away the many bed bug hiding places and also seals in any bed bug eggs or bed bug crawlers that you may have missed.

Next, reposition the bed so neither it nor the bed or any of the bedding garments make contact with the floor, walls or any neighboring furniture

that bed bugs can use as a bridge to circumvent the bed bug blockers installed beneath the bed legs. When completed correctly you've essentially blocked all access to the places bed bugs may use to climb up onto the bed. (While it is possible for bed bugs to climb up the wall and across the ceiling to drop onto the bed, bed bug experts argue about the relative possibilities of this specific behavior.)

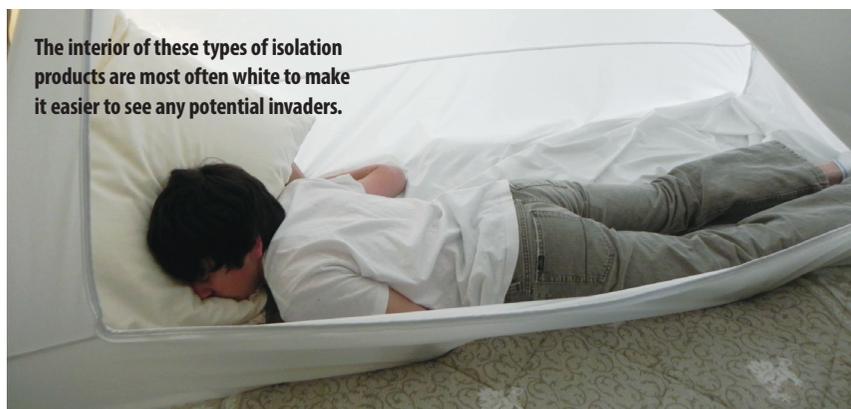
The bed isolation effort is not to be done in absence of other control work. Great reduction of the bed bug population present through the control program work will greatly reduce the possibility of a bed bug commando attack occurring.

While bed isolation can't guarantee a person will not be bitten, the isolation effort will greatly reduce, if not eliminate, the incidence of bed bug bites while the customer waits for the rest of the control program to become effective. By doing this, you provided the customer with some level of immediate relief.

Perhaps bed isolation as described isn't for everyone and there may be those who simply must have 100 percent assurance that no bites will occur. There are other options for these folks. In the recent past there are some fellow business travelers who report that they use "sleep suits" to prevent bed bug bites. However, these suits do not cover 100 percent of the body so bites may still occur on the hands and face.

Can we convert a bed into a safe haven for our customers? Can we prevent a person from being bitten tonight? Can we do this within the convenience of their home without too much inconvenience? Yes, if we use everything in our arsenal that the job calls for. **PMP**

Bello, author of The Bed Bug Combat Manual and president of PJB Pest Management Consulting, can be reached at paul.bello@att.net.



The interior of these types of isolation products are most often white to make it easier to see any potential invaders.