



Bed Bugs... Everyone Remain Calm

By Tim Dietz – SSA Sr. VP, Communications & Government Relations

It's not every day that operators in our industry have to deal with blood-sucking parasites. That is actual, authentic, blood sucking parasites. This is both a colorful and accurate description of the now iconic bed bug, the very pest that has sent the hotel industry into waves of hysteria *and terrible PR*.

I wanted to address this because the number of alerts I was getting (from very well meaning people) was, well, bugging me. Take the email about imported bed bugs asking everyone to stick their new clothes in a dryer so the eggs will be killed too. But aha...the Urban Legend website exposed this for what it was—which I should have known based on the line, “Pass this along to everyone on your email list!”

Some storage facilities are even putting out press releases stating that they are already taking evasive measures for bed bugs before one even enters their automatic gates. Why don't you just advertise that you've never had a murder at your facility... and you never plan to?

In addition to thousands of websites (mostly hosted by entities who can handle any problem for a fee), there is a “bed bug institute” and a now-famous bed bug registry threatening a scarlet letter upon any property reported for bed bugs. Before we go there, let's learn from the mistakes

of the hotel industry—and the “flea” market folks for that matter.

I'm not advocating against using expert exterminators, I'm just asking everyone to stay calm. Before we as an industry climb aboard this terrifying panic cruise, maybe we should take a measured approach and listen to the experts, not those ready to profit from our anxiety. In other words as an industry, let's not let the bed bugs bite.

Richard J. Pollack, PhD, is a research associate with the Harvard School of Public Health. According to Pollack, while we certainly don't want them, they aren't exactly the plague of locusts. “A few people have allergic reactions, and scratching can lead to secondary infection, but bed bugs are not known to transmit infectious diseases to humans,” says Pollack.

Dr. Pollack says the reaction to bed bugs can easily be worse than the actual insect. “Many people, whether they think they have bed bugs or truly do, will attempt to apply insecticides... they can overexpose themselves.”

The bed bug might in fact be the plague, but it isn't that yet. Until then, let's not encourage our own bed bug registry. Let's not give our tenants a reason to react to a problem before there is even a problem. Let's think about it calmly, take a deep breath and lie down—on our couches. ❖