

DON'T LET THE BED BUGS BITE: AN ANALYSIS OF PROACTIVE PEST CONTROL PRACTICES IN THE LODGING INDUSTRY

Laura McLoughlin; Advisor: Juline E. Mills

INTRODUCTION

In an industry that prides itself on cleanliness, from motels to five-star lodging, bed bugs is one problem that hotels are finding hard to exterminate. The large variety of customers that hotels service only contributes to the number of opportunities for bed bugs to infest and grow. Bed bugs in a hotel can result in guest complaints, legal investigations, and damages to reputation and future business, as evidenced by the following lawsuits and settlements.

Lawsuit	Features
Mathias vs. Accor	<u>Punitive</u> and compensatory damages of over \$350,000
Fox vs. Nevele Grand Resort & Country Club	\$20 M lawsuit for more than 600 bites
Kim vs. Hilton Corporation	Sued for physical scarring, emotional distress, and embarrassment
Grogan vs. Gamber Corporation	Hotel owner, contracted exterminators vs. guests

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Cockroaches, mice, termites, bed bugs – the lodging industry has long recognized the impact of pests on its businesses. Improved pest management policies, especially in the prevention stages, are becoming more and more critical for hotels today. The purpose of the study is to determine the extent of bed bug prevention, detection, and extermination practices utilized by the hotel industry.

STUDY BACKGROUND

A review of literature identified key aspects of bed bug management as follows:

- Prevention, primarily the integrated pest management plans and distribution of bed bug information materials to guests
- Detection, primarily the housekeeping procedures and monitoring devices
- Extermination, primarily documentation of incidents and using optimal control theory practices, such as heat. Optimal control theory investigates the best practice combined with minimal negative environmental impacts.

SURVEY AND DATA COLLECTION

A 46-question survey outlining prevention, detection, and extermination practices used against bed bugs was developed. The survey was administered by email to 400 hotels (classified as 30 rooms or more) listed by the Connecticut Lodging Association and the New York State Hospitality & Tourism Association. Response rate = 4%

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

- 50% of the respondents had an average occupancy rate of 80-100%
- 40% of the respondents had an average room rate of under \$100
- 80% of the respondents had at least one case of a bed bug infestation
- 60% of the respondents have monthly exterminator inspections

RESULTS

Areas of Concern	Positives	Negatives
Prevention	Integrated Pest Mgmt. (IPM) plans: 100%	Provide info on bed bugs to guests: Only 50%
Detection	House-keeping can identify bed bugs: 90%	<u>Never use</u> traps or monitoring devices: 83%
Extermination	Document all incidents: 92%	<u>Never use</u> heat to kill bed bugs: 75%

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In general, preventive measures were more effective than detection and extermination practices. Many of the respondents did not make use of the available resources for pest control, especially in the areas of detection and extermination (i.e., monitoring devices and heat extermination processes using optimal control theory). In terms of preventive measures, hotels lacked adequate distribution of informational materials for guests on preventing and detecting bed bug infestations. This study recommends for hoteliers to develop a more complete action plan for bed bug management in every operational aspect.