

## *The Unspeakable: How to Protect Your Property, Your Residents and Your Employees*

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It's a typical Monday morning at your community. A few residents linger in the lobby chatting near the mail boxes, others fix their cup of complimentary coffee. Reports indicate that the weekend was uneventful, always a good thing. Your staff is in full attendance and all is apparently going very well for a Monday morning. That is, until it happens.

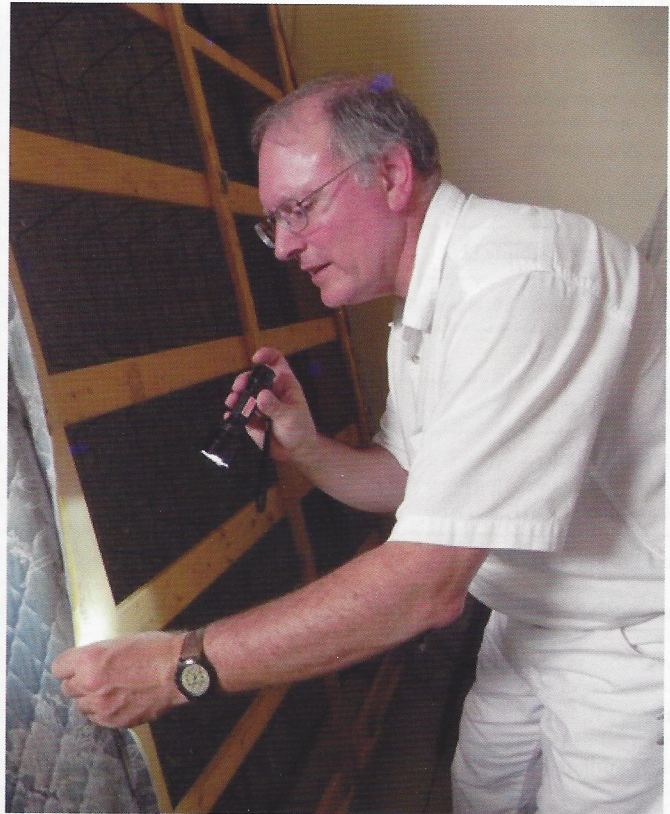
There you were, comfortably seated at your desk, computer booting up, pleasing aroma of fresh coffee in the air, when you were called to the front desk to assist a staff member. Upon arrival at the front desk you greet a resident and can sense that something is wrong. And, that's when you learn of the unspeakable - bed bugs.

Fortunately the resident has remained relatively calm up to this point. He tells you that something caused him to wake up at about 4 AM and then again at about 5 AM. He felt itchy and saw what appeared to be a number of bites on his arm and stomach. Upon turning a light on he saw a bug crawling on his bed sheets. He captured it, brought it to the front desk, and put you face to face with your first bed bug.

Grasping the potential severity of the situation, you quickly realize you may be in way over your head. Your immediate thoughts are how could I have prevented this from happening, how widespread is the problem, and what do I do now?

The scenario painted above is an example of what can happen at any multi-family community on any day in Atlanta or elsewhere. The apartment industry is subject to bed bugs and bed bugs can thrive in multi-family locations. The question is what can be done to best protect community facilities such as yours?

As an urban pest management consultant, bed bugs take up the majority of my time. Bed bug problems are thriving on a wide scale across the United States, highlighting a clear need to be better prepared. The ability to compose and implement a viable bed bug management program at any facility is dependent



*Paul Bello checks a box spring during a bed bug heat treatment.*

upon possessing a sound, fundamental knowledge of bed bugs. This knowledge should include topics such as biology, behavior, identification, inspection, recognition, control and prevention methodologies.

If confronted with the scenario described above, how well would you be prepared to deal with it if it happened at your community? Have you trained your staff members and armed them with the knowledge necessary to successfully address a bed bug situation? Better yet, how can you protect your property, your residents and your staff from a bed bug scenario from happening in the first place? Answers to these questions are addressed through proper and comprehensive training.



Below are a few tips and considerations to help you get started in the right direction regarding a proper bed bug program at your facility:

1. Be sure your entire staff including managers, agents and maintenance receives the proper training from a competent source.
2. Document and have a clearly defined policy on hand for staff.
3. Engage a competent professional bed bug management service to ensure all bases are covered. Ideally, the management firms will have or provide:
  - A sound bed bug control program
  - Complete answers to your questions and concerns
  - Adequate licensing and insurance
  - Membership in a related professional trade association
  - Technical director or consulting urban entomologist on staff

- Relevant experience with list of references
- Sound warranty program.

As property management professionals, you are under considerable pressure to be knowledgeable on a wide range of topics in order to be successful in your job. Industry resources can provide tremendous knowledge to assist in helping you make sound decisions regarding the well-being of your communities. Knowledgeable pest management experts can assist the multi-family housing industry in prevention and elimination of bed bug infestation.

***About the Author:*** Paul Bello is an urban and industrial pest management consultant with over thirty five years of experience. He has authored many articles on pest management, is a new member of AAA and may be reached for questions at [paul.bello@att.net](mailto:paul.bello@att.net).