



BED BUGS

Avoiding an Itchy Situation

BY LAUREN BOSTON

One apartment owner tells the real-life story of how he minimized resident backlash to bed bug infestations.

The mere mention of bed bugs would have most residents running for the exits, but one apartment company has discovered that honesty is the best policy when it comes to community infestations.

Brian Hendy, Senior Vice President of Wallick-Hendy Development, an Ohio-based company that operates 160 communities in six states, has been dealing with bed bugs since 2006 and isn't afraid to openly address the problem.

"Our philosophy is to remain transparent on all issues affecting our residents and prospects," says Hendy, who spoke on behalf of the apartment industry at a Congressional Bed Bug Forum last month in Washington, D.C. (see "Bed Bugs on the Hill," p. 40). "If we want residents to contact us immediately upon observing bed bugs, then we as owners must follow suit and provide proper disclosure. I'm not suggesting that owners should be required to follow overly burdensome legislation—such as the new law in New York City that requires disclosure of all bed bug infestations in the community from the previous year before prospective residents sign a lease—but I do feel that responsible owners should be open about the infestation problem."

Hendy says his candid, proactive approach is appreciated by most. A few residents moved out after bed bugs were found at their communities, but Hendy says the majority understand the problem and respect the timely, effective treatment of infestations made at his company's expense.

Scratching the Surface

While many owners are squeamish about publicly discussing the challenges of bed bugs at their properties, Hendy has been vocal about the need for increased attention to the issue. One important reason is the escalating cost of treatments as bed bug populations spread across the country. Since Wallick-Hendy's first reported infestation in Cincinnati in 2006, the company's annual spending on bed bug pest control has risen to \$400,000 a year by 2009.

Hendy has tried heat treatments to kill the bugs but says the \$1,000 to \$2,000 process is far too expensive and often damages the unit. The heat treatment also requires residents to vacate the apartment.

Instead, Hendy's company uses pesticides, which still cost \$150 per treatment and require at least two to three applications, he says. In severe cases, five or six applications are necessary. "It costs \$450 to treat one unit, so it's basically like flushing down an entire month of rent," he says.

With treatment fees ranging by as much as \$200 between pest

control companies for a typical three-treatment package, Hendy says his company has been aggressively bidding out the service for the past year. He encourages other management companies to do the same but also strongly recommends getting referrals from local apartment owners for pest control companies with bed bug experience.

Unable to pass on the additional expenses to residents, Wallick-

Hendy Development has seen the cost of bed bug treatments eat into the bottom line. The company has scaled back things such as landscaping and, in extreme cases, personnel, but Hendy says he also may need to consider charging residents (pending approval from regulatory agencies) if the problem doesn't subside.

"A vibrant property is good for everyone, and these cuts are affecting everyone," Hendy says. "Unless we get help from the government, sacrifices are going to become a fact of

life. And the money we're spending on bed bugs does nothing to improve the property or help the residents or owners."

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Brian Hendy
Senior Vice President
Wallick-Hendy
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Attention Needed

Several NAA members commented during the Assembly of Delegates meeting in November that they do not expect the government to invest much time and money in researching a way to eliminate bed bugs after recent press reports indicated that the Environmental Protection Agency continues to consider bed bugs as a nuisance, rather than a health hazard.

Most experts say it's proving nearly impossible to eradicate the current bed bug population, the original wave of which became virtually extinct in the 1950s with the introduction of DDT, an insecticide that was later found to be toxic



Learn More

For more information on bed bugs, check out the October cover story of *units*, "Getting to Know Bed Bugs" (pp. 36-42).

NAA's Bed Bug Resource Center is a comprehensive online repository that includes materials developed under the guidance of NAA's Bed Bugs Working Group. Visit www.naahq.org/governmentaffairs/issues/bedbugs.

NAA's National Lease Program also has added language to several addenda addressing bed bugs. Visit www.naahq.org/lease to purchase.

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Bed Bugs on Capitol Hill

Leading industry, scientific and federal experts gathered at the U.S. Capitol Nov. 18 as part of a Congressional forum convened to expand awareness of bed bugs, assess their impacts and discuss ways the federal government can support efforts to combat them.

Representing NAA/NMHC was Brian Hendy, Senior Vice President of Wallick-Hendy Development in Columbus, Ohio. Hendy made it clear that the bed bug problem is a top issue for the apartment industry. Bed bugs “create unique challenges to the apartment industry” because of the density of multifamily units and the rapidity with which infestations spread among units, he said. Hendy described the many impacts on multifamily housing, including the significant costs associated with bed bug eradication, which can run into thousands of dollars for treating a single unit.

Hendy recommended that the federal government expedite the re-labeling of existing pesticides, support research and development into new treatments, and educate the public on identifying bed bugs, protecting themselves when traveling, and reporting any suspected sighting of bed bugs.

Hendy noted that inspection protocols for federally assisted properties should acknowledge the unique nature of bed bug infestations. He praised the approach taken by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for inspections through its Real Estate Assessment Center. That process requires inspectors to report the presence of bed bugs but does not penalize owners. He hoped that federal oversight of other affordable housing programs, such as the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, would take a similar form. “Our concern is that owners and managers of these properties are not penalized for something that is largely out of their control,” Hendy said.

The “Don’t Let the Bed Bugs Bite Forum” was convened by U.S. Reps. G.K. Butterfield (D-N.C.) and Don Young (R-Alaska), who have co-sponsored legislation to, among other things, establish a grant program to assist states in inspecting hotel rooms for bed bugs. The bill would add bed bug prevention and management to public housing agency plan reporting requirements by amending the U.S. Housing Act of 1937. —NAA’s Government Affairs Department

to animals and humans and subsequently banned. Hendy’s company has focused on educating its residents and creating an open channel of dialogue. New residents are given a packet of information at move-in that includes tips to avoid bringing bed bugs into the home and what to do if you find them in your apartment.

Hendy says his maintenance staff is also inspecting apartments more frequently. With Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton and Cleveland, Ohio, among the top 15 most infested cities in the country, Hendy considers being aware of new infestations a must. “You always think of bed bugs as mythical creatures from an old-fashioned saying, but they became a very real problem.” ■■

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