



Housekeeping

by Petra J. Minoff

Mattress encasements protect guests and a hotel's reputation

Another great article from *The Rooms Chronicle*® the #1 journal for hotel rooms management! ***Important notice: This article may not be reproduced without permission of the publisher or the author.*** College of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Niagara University, P.O. Box 2036, Niagara University, NY 14109-2036. Phone: 866-Read TRC. E-mail: editor@roomschronicle.com

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Type the words “bed bugs” in a simple Google search and the results are astonishing. In today’s world, bed bugs are popping up everywhere – in dormitories, mansions, apartments, schools, subways and even movie theaters, airplanes, and trains – and in every corner of the country at any type of hotel.

While bed bugs had been shown the “no vacancy” sign in the United States for nearly 50 years, it’s no secret they are back and can be found in many hotels, including the expensive ones – feasting on unsuspecting hotel guests. Seventy percent of the bed bugs are taking up residence in mattresses, box springs, night stands and headboards.

These creatures have been making a resurgence since the late 1990s and can populate even the cleanest, most affluent hotels. Frankly, all a bed bug is looking for is its next blood meal. And bedbugs will hitchhike to any hotel on suitcases, bags, shoes or furniture to get it.

What’s more alarming than the number of hotels facing problems is the swarm of media coverage surrounding it. Web sites and blogs are dedicated to publishing the latest infested locations with the street address of the inflicted hotel. TripAdvisor.com has more than 20,000 reviews that feature hotels afflicted with bed bugs.

For a hotel owner or operator, the impact of a bed bug sighting can be devastating. Business drops and damage to the infested hotel’s reputation can take years to repair. The hotel’s brand can also suffer negative repercussions due to media coverage about the issue, meaning hotels across the country with the same brand can be associated with the issue. And, once bed bugs infest a mattress, the mattress must usually be replaced and the room fumigated. Add to that potential of lawsuits from humiliated bed bug victims seeking monetary retribution – and any hotel could have one potential expensive problem.

Discarded mattresses fill landfills

The environment suffers, too, as the discarded mattresses fill landfills. In fact, it’s estimated that in just one day at a local landfill, more than 300 old mattresses and box springs are added to the pile. If laid out end-to-end, they would stretch more than a third of a mile.

Hotel owners and operators can contribute to this disposal problem. As many hoteliers are well aware, soiled or bed bug infested mattresses don’t go away easily. They are bulky, not reusable and difficult to recycle. Putting them in a landfill is not a sustainable option and can also be costly as a number of landfill operators are charging an extra fee to dispose of them.

Protect the hotel’s investment

Even if your hotel hasn’t had a reputation-damaging problem, the heightened awareness surrounding bed bugs has encouraged guests to inspect their rooms, particularly the mattress. The hotel’s mattresses better not have signs of bed bugs or other stains (due to bodily fluid, perspiration or messy spills) or hotel guests will complain and you’ll be left to face what can be an expensive problem. The easiest thing to do is protect ownership’s substantial investment in the hotel’s mattresses and box springs.

The best way to keep hotel guests happy and prevent mattresses from ending up in the landfill is to fully encase it. Encasements also increase the efficiency of the control effort by allowing for early bed bug detection. In fact, controlling bed bugs – and preserving the mattress – can be easy by using an encasement that is proven to be completely bed-bug proof.

Pictured right: The absorbent, stainproof and waterproof Protect-A-Bed AllerZip[®] Bedding Encasement featuring BugLock[®] with Secure Seal is completely bed bug bite-, entry- and escape-proof.



Protect-A-Bed®, one of the leading bedding protectors in the world, manufactures an entire line of encasements designed to help stem a bed bug infestation. An encasement protects new bedding and salvages infested bedding, aids in the early detection of bed bugs and decreases the scope of re-infestation. In a nutshell, they save hotel operators both time and money by drastically reducing the amount of effort associated with addressing infested bedding.

Time management

It takes an extraordinary amount of time to inspect and treat an infested mattress and box spring. The time expands exponentially when pest operators return on follow-up visits and have to search even harder to locate bed bugs they may have missed on their initial visit. Treatment of a typical mattress and box spring can require upwards of 45 minutes. By applying an encasement, a hotel can eliminate the need to search through the complex workings of bedding. By limiting all bed bugs to the outer surface of the encasement, an operator can treat a bedding set in under 15 minutes.

Long-term management

Bed bug proof encasements make the tell-tale signs of bed bugs – fecal spotting and blood spots – readily identifiable. The signs appear very easily on the white fabric of the encasement, which allows housekeeping personnel to easily spot them and quickly alert a pest control professional. By identifying the signs of bed bug activity as soon as possible, it allows the pest control operator to address and manage the infestation in a timely manner. Using encasements in conjunction with a simple employee training program can manage a bed bug problem before it gets out of hand.

Conversely, if encasements are not used, bed bugs are likely to get inside of the mattress or box springs where they will not be detected by housekeeping staff during routine inspections and may even be missed by pest control professionals during intensive inspections. The end result is that infestations that go undetected may be brought to the hotel's attention by a guest prior to management having knowledge that the bugs were present.

Finding an effective encasement

There are many encasements available in the marketplace and it's important to investigate whether or not the encasement has been scientifically tested to be effective against bed bugs. In order for an encasement to be effective, it must be both bite-proof (meaning that the bugs cannot feed through the material) and escape-proof (meaning that the bugs cannot get in or out of the encasement after it has been installed). Unless the encasements have been specifically designed for bed bugs, it is very unlikely that they will work effectively.

The Protect-A-Bed AllerZip® Bedding Encasement featuring BugLock® with Secure Seal is the first scientifically proven bed bug entry-, escape- and bite-proof mattress encasement. It is manufactured with the leading technology in bed bug bite-proof material, known as the Miracle Membrane. The Miracle Membrane not only prevents the bed bugs from piercing through the fabric, it also increases the sanitation of the bedding by being waterproof, air vapor porous, an allergen barrier, and a dust mite barrier.

"In my opinion, the best encasements designed are by Protect-A-Bed. These mattress and box spring encasements were developed specifically for use with bed bugs," said noted entomologist Richard Cooper from BedBugCentral.com. "They have been tested extensively by an independent research laboratory using scientific methodology, to demonstrate that they are completely bite-proof and escape-proof."

According to Cooper, with Protect-A-Bed's "bug lock" design, bed bugs have nowhere to hide. "One of the greatest points of vulnerability in encasements is at the zipper end stop, where the zipper pull comes to a rest. In addition to the zipper being escape-proof, the Protect-A-Bed encasements feature a patented design that prevents bugs from escaping, even if the zipper pulls back slightly from its closed position."

To learn more about encasements, and about choosing the best one for your property, watch Rick Cooper's encasement comparison study by visiting <http://rc.bedbugcentral.com>.

Don't wait until it's too late

As a responsible hotel operator, it is advisable to develop and implement an aggressive approach (both proactive and reactive) for dealing with bed bugs in your facility. After all, the steps you put in place and follow will not only help prevent bed bugs from infesting the property, it can preserve the hotel's reputation and cut down on costs associated with mattress and box spring replacement, and, more importantly keep them out of landfills. ✧

(Petra Minoff established and developed the Hospitality Division for Protect-A-Bed®, a premier provider of mattress protectors and encasements. She currently serves as the division's Vice President of Sales. Minoff has been instrumental in designing Protect-A-Bed's line of bed bug proof encasements, which won the Editors' Choice Award in 2007 at the International Hotel/Motel & Restaurant Show. For more information, visit www.protectabed.com.)