

Earlier this year, the National Pest Management Association (NPMA) and the University of Kentucky surveyed a nationwide sample of pest management professionals. Similar research was conducted in 2010, 2011, and 2013. This summary highlights findings of the current study and refers to the earlier surveys when comparisons are instructive.

*The 2015 NPMA/University of Kentucky Bed Bug Survey: Executive Summary
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Once again, the pest management industry has explored a topic that leaves most Americans very uncomfortable: bed bugs. Though the public may fear these bloodsucking insects – there is much to be learned from those who find, treat, and eradicate bed bugs in most of the places people live, work and spend leisure time. To that end, pest management professionals (PMPs) across the country participated in an online survey, conducted by the National Pest Management Association (NPMA) and the University of Kentucky on a biennial basis. This report features the key findings.

Still a Problem. Nearly two out of three pest management professionals (PMP) (64%) report that bed bug infestations continue to be on the rise.

Bed bug infestations are a year-round phenomenon. However, six out of ten PMPs (61%) noted seasonal differences in frequency, with “peak season” tending to be summertime. This is likely due to a spike in travel during which people can unknowingly bring bed bugs home.

Just About Everywhere. Bed bugs are found wherever there are people. In 2015, more than 90% of professionals battled bed bugs in apartments, condominiums, and single-family homes, and three-fourths (74%) encountered infestations in hotels and motels. Since 2013, occurrences have also spiked in such places as nursing homes, office buildings, and on public transportation. Respondents also report infestations in shelters, college dorms, day-care centers, health care facilities, stores, libraries, and movie theaters. Specifically:

- Nursing homes – 58 percent (46 percent in 2013)
- Office buildings – 45 percent (36 percent in 2013)
- Schools and day care centers – 43 percent (41 percent in 2013)
- Hospitals – 36 percent (33 percent in 2013)
- Doctor’s offices/outpatient facilities – 33 percent (26 percent in 2013)
- Transportation (train/bus/taxi) – 29 percent (21 percent in 2013)
- Retail stores – 20 percent (15 percent in 2013)
- Movie theaters – 16 percent (10 percent in 2013)

Bed bugs are also found in more unusual spots as evidenced by several anecdotes from respondents – one PMP found bed bugs at a dance club, another in a casket with the deceased and yet another, in a vent above a bathtub. In short, pest management professionals encounter bed bugs in a wide range of places – some expected, others surprising.

Public Attitudes. Two out of five PMPs (43%) report that customers are expressing more concern about bed bugs than those in the previous year. Only a handful (6%) claim that customers today are expressing less concern, leaving half (51%) noting that little has changed.

Finding and Treating Bed Bugs. Visual inspection continues to be the most common method of finding bed bugs by professionals. Given their cryptic nature, other methods, are also more popular than they were in previous surveys, including traps designed to intercept and capture bed bugs en route to their next meal.

Once bed bugs are found, nearly all PMPs (95%) treat them with insecticides. Many professionals (84%) also utilize mattress encasements, and have clients launder infested items (79%). Fewer PMPs use vacuums (62%), heat treatments (40%), or steam (38%). Notably, one treatment – the disposal of infested items – has become less popular, with 47% recommending disposal this year compared with 62% in 2011.

Nearly eight out of ten PMPs (77%) perform preventive bed bug treatments, up from six out of ten (60%) in 2012. Typically, these proactive services involve inspection and monitoring in order to detect infestations early, when they are easier to manage.

Bed bugs continue to be the most difficult pest to control, according to 68 percent of survey respondents. By comparison, 21 percent point to ants, 9 percent specify cockroaches and 2 percent list termites as the most difficult pests they face.

Homeowner clutter was cited as the biggest customer-oriented challenge in treating bed bugs by 80 percent of the respondents; followed by customers not following advice (62%) and re-infestation (24%). Proving how easily bed bugs can be transported from place to place, 29 percent of respondents said that company employees have accidentally brought bed bugs to their home or the office from a treatment site.

As in previous years, these findings underscore the need for continued education and awareness building among the American public regarding bed bugs. While the professional pest management industry is able to eliminate infestations, treatments can be costly, time consuming and disruptive to consumers. Bed bugs appear to be here to stay, but their spread can be stemmed by a vigilant public who takes steps to prevent infestations wherever they go.

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The NPMA, a nonprofit organization with more than 7,000 members, was established in 1933 to support the pest management industry's commitment to the protection of public health, food and property. For more information, visit PestWorld.org and AllThingsBedBugs.org, NPMA's resource on everything bed bug related, from prevention tips to current news.