

BED BUGS—SHOULD YOU BE WORRIED?

Most of us heard the nursery rhyme warning “don’t let the bed bugs bite,” but grew up without even knowing what this mythical bed bug was. Unfortunately, bed bugs have made a rampant return, and are proving to be a major nuisance in many urban areas.

Bed bugs are reddish brown in color, have an oval shape, and are about a quarter inch long. They like to live within five feet of their host, which means mattresses and clutter around the bed are the most likely place for them to gather and breed. While they don’t breed nearly as fast as some other parasites, they are extremely resilient, resisting both chemical treatments and starvation (they can live up to



eighteen months without feeding).

One of the few consolations is that bed bugs do not carry any known pathogens or diseases. That said, they can cost landlords and property management firms in lost rent, battered reputations, and lawsuits, despite the fact that it is usually the tenants who bring the bed bugs into apartments and rental homes.

As a landlord you’ll need a comprehensive bed bug policy to prevent infestations, eradicate colonies if they arise, and pre-

vent lawsuits and other risks caused by bed bugs.

Step 1: Before Signing a Lease Agreement with New Tenants

Since the first property infestation we have been diligently working on training our staff to recognize bed bugs and signs of their infestation, so that we are better equipped to catch an infestation early on, when it’s still relatively easy to treat.

In some cases it is nearly impossible to catch an infestation as the pests are not visible or present. Fleas and bed bugs are two very elusive pests that can live in a property without any signs because of their hatching cycles.

Step 2: The Lease Agreement Itself

Leases should require tenants to report all pest sightings – including bed bugs – to the landlord or property management company immediately. There are some states where the landlord or property management company are automatically responsible for bed bug treatment and damages, such as New Jersey, Maine, and Massachusetts. However, in California this is not yet written into legislation.

Step 3: Include a Bed Bug Lease Addendum

As your management company we are working to institute, upon signing the lease agreement, a written addendum that specifies that the tenant is obligated to allow entry to pest control exterminators to treat a bed bug infestation if it arises, and to cooperate fully in eradicating any bed bug infestations.

Additionally, we will indicate that failure to report bed bugs or to cooperate in their treatment is a breach of the lease agreement. Please stay tuned for more informa-

tion from us regarding this very topical addendum, which will be very important to multi-family dwellings, as bed bugs can spread from unit to unit in these properties easily.

Step 4: Keeping Our Tenants Educated

We are also educating our tenants about what bed bugs look like, how to identify signs of their presence, where they like to live, how to prevent their entry to the rental unit, and that reducing clutter in the apartment reduces the number of places they can live. It’s also worth mentioning that often tenant furniture must be burned or otherwise destroyed once an infestation occurs – an outcome that most tenants will go to lengths to avoid.

Step 5: Bed Bug Treatment

The earlier you treat a bed bug infestation, the easier it is to contain and eradicate. Contacting your pest control company immediately upon evidence of an infestation is important. Second, inform tenants not to move any of their furniture or belongings before the pest control exterminators arrive – moving belongings can spread the infestation.

The items that can be washed, such as linens, blankets, sofa covers, and clothes, should be washed in the hottest possible water, with detergent, and dried with high heat. If this is not done properly the pests can live and spread. Furniture may need to be destroyed, depending on the recommendation of the pest control company.

The pest control company has a variety of treatments available at their disposal, including the use of steam, extreme heat or cold, chemical carpet treatments, and fumigation. These treatments should only be performed by a licensed professional.

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PRANDI Property Management, Inc. proudly holds the Prestigious Certified Residential Management Company (CRMC®) designation, from the National Association of Residential Property Managers (NARPM).

Vision Statement...

To be the most trusted name in property management services in Marin County by offering unparalleled customer service through effective communication, technology, and continued education. The PRANDI Team will continue to be the most respected leader in the industry and strengthen our presence in Central and Southern Marin.

THINGS TO KEEP YOU "IN THE KNOW"

As current members of the San Rafael, San Anselmo and Corte Madera Chambers of Commerce we are *pleased to announce our membership in the Sausalito Chamber*. At the most recent meeting we learned some valuable information including three upcoming classes that we will be attending. The first is "Social Networking and Your Small Business" in January, "Tax & Financial Planning Update for 2011" and "Customer Appreciation" in March. We hope to gain valuable information to share with you and implement for 2011!

Please note your **Annual 2010 Summaries and 1099 Misc. will be arriving via regular mail soon**—we decided to mail these to you instead of uploading them to your portal, as they are very important documents for your taxes. There will be one 1099 Misc. for the old software program dated 1/1/10 to 6/30/10, and one from the new program dated 7/1/10 to 12/31/10 in the same envelope, together with your 2010 Summaries.

On another note, your *PRANDI team has been working extremely hard* to transition to a more paperless office. In our efforts to "go green" we will have our first online client survey! Please look out for an online survey in your email inbox in February. We ask that you please consider completing the survey, as this helps our company execute policies that **benefit you**, as well as helps us to gain valuable feedback and review our services for the upcoming year. You will receive this survey from SurveyMonkey.com, a popular online surveying tool.

As always, if you would like to provide us with feedback you can always email our Owner/Broker Melissa Prandi, MPM at Melissa@prandiprop.com.

Thank you & Happy Valentine's Day!

—Your PRANDI Property Management Team



A wonderful photo taken last week by Property Manager Matt Borries.

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Liability

In California there are no laws that state specific liability on either tenant or owner of rental properties. That said, landlords and property management companies can minimize the risk of bed bugs, and their legal liability, by following the directions above, and therefore creating a paper trail of their diligence. Nevertheless, many times the costs of eradication and the burden is the property owners.

By adhering to the guidelines above, you can document your diligence, and can both prevent bed bug infestations

before they happen, and catch infestations early before they become an expensive problem.

The most important thing that you, as a landlord, can do is to be proactive in preventing bed bug infestations.

Since this is a new epidemic in Marin County we are being proactive in combating this issue and preparing ourselves for future infestations. We have established good relationships with local pest control companies, and are creating a bed bug policy that includes verbiage in the lease agreement and/or addendums and disclosures.