



David Cain of Bed Bugs speaking in London in December

# A passion for Bedbugs

The article *Bedbugs fascinate in Budapest* (see pages 19-21) detailed the key points emerging from the ICUP bedbug workshop which involved the majority of key international experts on this pest. Attending a one-day seminar organised by one individual company, Bed Bugs Ltd, provided a stark contrast. **Pest** editor Frances McKim reports.

This one-day event held on 15 December 2008 in Central London was organised by David Cain, managing director of London-based Bed Bugs Ltd ([www.bed-bugs.co.uk](http://www.bed-bugs.co.uk)).

Unlike most pest control operations, this company deals exclusively with one pest, bedbugs, and it treats their eradication with a passion verging on manic. However, as other inspired leaders have discovered, their personal drive and determination can sometimes lead to frustrations and the 'breaking of eggs' along the way. An interesting day was in prospect.

First up, bedbug infestation data was presented and discussed. This data had been acquired by Bed Bugs Ltd from the London Borough pest control units under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Out of a total of 32 Councils, 20 supplied data, although several did not record it in the appropriate form, and the balance did not reply.

One major problem when analysing the information soon became apparent; the variation in what was recorded and saved, often in non-complementary ways. Although the data could be analysed down to individual post code area, no allowance was made for the pest control charging policy of each Authority, a factor which can greatly influence the number of infestations reported.

Even so, once plotted the data revealed clearly identifiable 'hot spots' and also ribbons of heavy and rapidly increasing infestations which David Cain has christened 'corridors of infestation'. When examined, claims David, these corridors, appear to follow transportation links, for example bus and train routes from Gatwick airport.

In some areas of London David maintained that bedbug infestations had risen by between 300% and 1,500%. He said: "If we don't grasp the extent of this problem today, then it will only be a matter of time before we get back to the 1930s levels when one third of all London dwellings were infested with bedbugs. I measure that time in months, not years."

## Two types of infestation

David has identified two types of bedbug infestations – single and local exposure events.

The single exposure event comes about when an individual is exposed a single time to an established infestation – for example in a hotel bedroom, picked-up on bags whilst travelling, from an item brought into the home or from a guest or visitor. David's view is that public education and checking for these pests is key if infestations are to be avoided.

On the other hand, local exposure events are a harder nut to crack. Individuals may come into regular contact with a bedbug source – from adjoining properties, from public spaces such as bars and restaurants, public transport, regular visitors or even at religious meetings. Here there is a need for public screening and inspections, as well as increased awareness levels.

Echoing one of the recommendations from the ICUP workshop, David called for bedbugs to be awarded notifiable pest status – only by doing this will infestations be accurately monitored and analysed. Hot spots could be quickly identified, as would the operations of any rogue pest controllers or 'spray and pray' merchants.

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Education of certain key workers was called for. For example refuse collectors and social workers could act as extra eyes and ears on the ground, community groups for non-English speakers and religious groups to help overcome communication and social barriers.

When it comes to treating bed bug infestations, David stressed that the pest controller needs to think more like a forensic scientist so as to get to the root of the problem. He said: "Bedbug control requires extremely high specification work and co-operation between all parties."

Treatments offered by Bed Bugs include both on-site and off-site treatment of personal possessions and a soon to be introduced bedbug sniffer dog service. David remained unnaturally coy when asked what chemical treatments he employed and if resistance to the more traditional pesticides posed any sort of problem.

As far as success goes, David claimed that via his methods 60% of all infestations were eradicated in a single treatment, rising to 89% with two treatment cycles.

Again echoing the ICUP workshop, David pleaded for improved detection of infestations with the use of monitors. He hinted that 'passive' and 'active' monitoring devices were in the final stages of development by his own company.



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