



## FACILITIES AND MAINTENANCE

by Noel McCarthy

# Keeping Campuses Safe from Bacteria, Bugs, Rodents, and Insects

Of all the issues you have to deal with, the most unpleasant, and rarely discussed, is probably the subject of pest infestation. Regardless of how minor the problem appears to be, it's not something you can ever ignore or put aside. The repercussions can be grim, and I just don't mean those invasive bugs.

But first, it may surprise you to know that however much you clean and maintain your facilities, you will never make them inhospitable to bugs, be they fleas, ants, bed bugs, lice, ticks, etc. In fact, research has shown that even the nicest and most sanitary home, office, rest home, dorm or fitness center can harbor more pests than one might imagine.

### Clean Doesn't Mean Bug-Free

It turns out that buildings in well-appointed areas are more biologically diverse. Think of your particular campus from an ecological point of view and chances are good that it's home to a wide range of creatures: birds, bats, squirrels, chipmunks, possum, deer, turkey, and foxes. Now add to that the greater variety of plants and trees that thrive on the campus grounds, and it's easy to see why they appeal to so many more "boarders."

According to Misha Leong, a postdoctoral candidate in the Department of Entomology at the California Academy of Sciences, “Our work overturns the general perception that homes in poorer neighborhoods host more indoor arthropods. Our unexpected, and perhaps counterintuitive finding highlights how much we have yet to learn about indoor ecology.”

## The Main Pests You Have to Deal With

The truth is that the number and kinds of bugs you have to deal with are almost endless, but there are a few that seem to top the list of virtually every facilities manager. They include bed bugs, fleas, cockroaches, ticks, rodents, ants, and flies, among others. However, a few of your main adversaries are listed below and have to be tackled in different ways.

### Bed Bugs

According to one report, bed bugs can be found in 25% of all buildings, and that includes homes, offices, hospitals, college dorms, and stores; in other words, everywhere. Small, oval and brownish in color, adult bed bugs have flat bodies

But there’s another reason you need to quickly and decisively deal with any insect infestation: your institution’s reputation. As Warren Buffett said, “It takes...years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently.” If your students, and especially their parents—to say nothing of alumni donors—get wind of pest infestation, your university can take a real hit.

about the size of an apple seed. Fortunately, they can’t fly, and they usually make their way into buildings undetected, brought in with luggage, backpacks, clothing, used beds and couches and other innocent-looking items. A truly massive infestation is easy to spot; otherwise, you’ll have to depend on small clues to their presence, such as reddish or rusty stains on sheets or mattresses, or dark spots on sheets, pillows, and along mattress seams. Sorry to say that bed bugs can fit into very small spaces, and can quickly spread from room to room, preferring to live in cracks or other inaccessible spots.

### Rodents

Rodent droppings are an obvious sign that a dorm or a kitchen harbors mice and/or rats, and they’re easy to identify. Mice droppings are smooth, small with pointed ends and look a lot like caraway seeds. Rat droppings are shiny, black and about 1/2 - 3/4 of an inch long. Chew marks—on food containers and boxes, as well as on wiring and cupboard doors—are another indication that you have rodents on board.

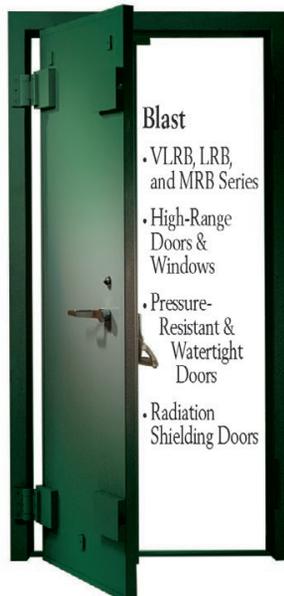
You will need to inspect baseboards, door frames, doors and inside cabinets to track down rodent hangouts. But you might also see tiny

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footprints or lines from tails dragging in dusty areas. Plus, if you check along baseboards, in corners and near food sources, you may well find the entrance point used by these pests. Another clue to the presence of rats or mice is a lingering, musky odor, that doesn't vanish—even if you open the windows or use an aerosol deodorant.

## Cockroaches

Originating in the Carboniferous era, more than 280 million years ago, cockroaches are among the most adaptable organisms on the planet, which, while admirable, also makes eliminating them a real challenge. Although there are some 4,000 different species distributed worldwide, the type you're most likely to encounter is the German cockroach, which was once the most pervasive pest in American residential and commercial buildings. Unfortunately, for every cockroach you see there are probably scores more hiding inside ceiling spaces and behind the walls—as well as under sinks, inside cabinets and drawers, even kitchen appliances. Predictably enough, cockroaches tend to concentrate in areas where the temperature or humidity is highest, and that can make it difficult to locate their so-called “aggregation sites.” However, these pests leave brownish “spotting” at these sites, which helps when you're applying insecticides.

Of course, you may still have to contend with your other two problem pests—namely flies and ants—but these bugs are particularly hard to handle and almost always require the ministrations of a pest management professional.

## Top Campus Attractions for Pests

If a mad scientist had to invent the ideal habitat for today's myriad pest populations, she or he couldn't do better than a university campus. It provides almost everything pests of every type need: food, water, shelter that's (generally) cool in summer and warm in winter. However, some parts of a campus will be more attractive than others to these various and varied interlopers, so let's consider a few of the top pest attractions.

## Dormitories, Residence Halls, and Apartments

Given the life-styles of so many of today's students, it should come as no surprise that their living arrangements attract pests of all kinds. Students are notoriously lax when it comes to household cleanliness: unwashed dishes, open food containers, rarely emptied garbage cans, even dirty laundry left in corners and on floors, are an open invitation to roaches, flies, bed bugs, and so forth. Add to that the fact that many dormitories and apartments see a steady turnover of students—as well as the comings and goings of friends and the inevitable influx of used furniture and personal belongings. This steady traffic makes it easy for bugs to make their way into buildings, where they can rapidly breed.

## Dining Halls and Cafeterias

This is another obvious “hot spot” when it comes to pest management concerns. While the volume of foot traffic varies a lot during the day and evening, the constant flow of students, visitors, catering and maintenance staff makes it easy for a variety of pests to make their way into food service facilities. That's why it's important that

employees make sure that food is properly stored; that food-preparation areas are kept scrupulously clean; that dirty dishes are washed and stored appropriately; and that kitchen floors and appliances are cleaned and sanitized numerous times a day. Garbage, of course, should be removed frequently and stored in containers that are pest proof.

### Classrooms, Lecture Halls, and Faculty/Administration Offices

Once again, these high traffic areas are particularly prone to pest intrusions, especially if careful attention is not given to rigorous cleaning, regular vacuuming of carpets and rugs, and routine garbage disposal. Another often overlooked problem is students (and perhaps even the occasional faculty member) bringing snacks and other food items into classrooms and lecture halls. The crumbs they invariably leave behind are movable feasts for all sorts of pests. Better to keep them out.

### Restrooms, Showers, and Laundry Rooms

Restrooms, by definition, are unsanitary and, in dorms and residence halls, in need of regular cleaning. This is especially true if the facilities have leaking pipes, or are prone to clogged drains. Student shower areas can also be a problem, since they offer pests an easily accessible source of water.

### Gymnasiums, Stadiums, and Locker Rooms

Stadiums, locker rooms, and gymnasium areas obviously don't get nearly the traffic that other sections on campus do, but they nevertheless provide readily accessible accommodation for any number of pests, especially rats, mice, and squirrels. Facilities managers should ensure that assorted debris and food waste are removed from these areas, especially around food stations or concession stands. Locker rooms, in particular, should be emptied and cleaned frequently, even during vacations.

### You Must Have a Plan

The key to any pest management program is education not just of the students or faculty but all of the university's employees including the President, Deans, the Provost; food service and catering management; grounds and building maintenance teams; security, general administration employees; and all the other teams and groups responsible for the successful running of the university.

Whoever plans and administers these programs should make sure that everyone on staff knows at least the basics of pest management, including being able to recognize both the telltale signs of pests, and their biology and habits. Keep in mind that should you get a report about any pest intrusion, you should act on it immediately. Hesitation can have grave consequences.

### One Last Concern

But there's another reason you need to quickly and decisively deal with any insect infestation: your institution's reputation. As Warren Buffett said, "It takes...years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently."

If your students, and especially their parents—to say nothing of alumni donors—get wind of pest infestation, your university can take a real hit. Keep in mind that in these days of social media and almost instant 24/7 communication, one report of pests on campus can mushroom into a tsunami of bad press.

Of course, it is often up to university staff members to deal with these various pest problems. It makes sense, financially and logistically. But do not try to tackle a major infestation with campus employees alone. For that you need a reliable, well-established pest management company. Not only will the company be able to deal with the immediate problem, but they will also be able to identify other problems you may not be aware of. Trust their judgment.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Noel McCarthy has worked as a writer and editor throughout his career. A former director for Thomson Reuters, Noel also worked for PwC for 17 years. As staff writer at Sterifab, Noel has developed a newfound expertise in bed bugs. He has enjoyed learning about these pesky little pests, and their entourage of friends including lice, mites and more.

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