



PEST MANAGEMENT



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The Pest Bulletin

Spring Pests Waiting to Emerge

Spring is just around the corner, so where are all of those pests that will start invading homes in just a few months?

Pests have developed a number of clever ways to wait out cold conditions. Some, such as carpenter ants, actually produce an anti-freeze—glycerol—that allows them to survive at colder temperatures without their bodies freezing.

Ants move deeper into the ground to escape colder temperatures. Many ant colonies move up and down in the soil daily throughout the year. They bring their ant larvae and pupae up to where



the sun warms the top layers of the colony during the day, and then move them lower

at night to keep them warmer. So it is an easy matter for ants to move a little deeper during cold winter months.

Some pests hide in protected places and go into a state of diapause where their body functions slow way down, allowing them to survive until conditions are better again.

For other pests, all the tender adults may die, and only a tougher life-stage survives. For instance, adult moths are easily killed by cold temperatures, but their eggs or pupae are much more weather-resistant and survive cold periods. These continue their development as soon as the weather warms.

Of course indoor pests like cockroaches, pantry pests, mice, and others continue to feed year-round in warm areas indoors. Before we know it, these pests, plus pests that wintered outdoors, will once again become more active and troublesome!

Food Pests: An Ancient Problem

From caveman times to modern times, stored food pests have greatly reduced the amount of food available to humans. It all started when cave man learned he could survive winters better by storing food. In doing this, he created a new food bonanza for certain pests.



When he harvested the food, he brought in insects that occur naturally on corn, wheat, and other grains in the wild. These pests eventually became well adapted to living in and eating his accumulations of food. Protected from the cold and rain, many species of pests could feed and multiply year round, consuming and ruining our foods.

Stored food pests were often in the food ancient man ate. We know this because paleontologists have discovered fragments of some of the same pantry

pests we have today in human coprolites (petrified feces).

Pantry pests have also been found inside sealed Egyptian tombs. A flour beetle was recovered from food in an Egyptian tomb made around 2,500 B.C. King Tut's tomb, built around 1,380 B.C., had several kinds of stored food beetles in it.

Even today, stored food pests consume and contaminate a huge amount of food, whether it's in a clay jug, a modern silo, or a box of cake mix. Losses worldwide are estimated at 15 to 25% each year. A loss of 20% means that all the crops planted by farmers are lost every 5th year! Fortunately, the modern methods of professional pest management we use today in silos, food processing plants, grocery stores, and homes keep our losses from stored food pests to far below the worldwide average.

Pest Prevention Tip of the Month

When you are in your attic, possibly putting away holiday decorations, make sure any vents there have strong, well-attached screening on them. Squirrels, rats, and other wildlife will push aside or chew around screens that are not strongly attached, and any gaps and holes then become an entry for bats and other creatures.



Our family portrait. Grandpa was 1 month old!

## Zika Update

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently warned that pregnant women should now avoid Brownsville, Texas, where local mosquitoes have infected five people with the spreading Zika virus. The virus can cause birth defects to a fetus when a woman becomes infected during pregnancy.



The Miami and South Beach area of Florida, where local mosquitoes had started infecting people with Zika starting last July, was declared free of locally-transmitted Zika in December by Governor Scott. This is a welcome development, just in time for the winter travel season! (In all, Florida has reported 249 locally transmitted cases of the virus.)

People become infected by Zika when they are bitten by infected mosquitoes. Most people with Zika were infected while traveling to Central or South America where the virus has spread, but the virus could become established in parts of the U.S. Besides birth defects, the virus can cause a rash, high fever, and other symptoms. Only 20% of people infected with the virus show symptoms.

Recently it was discovered that the virus can be transmitted sexually. Because of this, people who travel to areas where there is Zika, even if they show no symptoms of the disease, should abstain from sex or use safe sex measures for six months after returning.

About 5,000 cases of Zika have been reported in the U.S.

## Germs & Kitchen Sponges



When testing 500 wet dishcloths and towels from five cities, researchers at the

University of Arizona found **2/3** contained bacteria that can make people sick!

Remember, wash your dishcloths frequently and replace kitchen sponges often. Many people do not realize that they can wash sponges in the dishwasher—simply place them on the top rack, away from the heater coil. Or place them in the microwave for two minutes to eliminate harmful bacteria.

When cleaning up juices from poultry and other meats, use paper towels so you are less likely to contaminate other foods.

## New Study: Mice Are A Major Cause of Allergies in Children



A new study published in *JAMA Pediatrics* found that children's asthma symptoms can be triggered by exposure to rodent allergens, especially in schools.

In the study, dust samples were taken at 37 inner-city schools in the Northeast, and analyzed for allergens. Allergens from mice were found in almost every sample taken, and the levels of allergens were generally even higher than allergen levels in homes. *The study also found that children who attended schools that had higher mouse allergen levels also tended to have asthma symptoms, including decreased lung function, more often.*

Other allergens were also detected in the schools, from cockroaches, rats, dust mites, and cat and dog dander, but at lower levels, and only mouse allergens levels were linked to the severity of students' asthma symptoms.

Asthma is a serious problem. Over 6 million children, or 15% of children in the U.S., have asthma, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Previously, a lot of studies looked at allergen levels in homes, but since children spend so much time in school, exposure there is also important. Previous studies have found mouse allergens in 95% of the homes tested. This means that children are exposed to mouse allergens for part of the day in schools, and then continue to be exposed at home.

Cleaning removes allergens, but not all of them. That is why it is so important to not allow pests like mice and cockroaches to become problems in the first place. Prevention is the key.

## Please Don't Smuggle in "Pets"!

Did you know there are over 50,000 non-native species of plants, animals (including insects) and microbes in this country? This costs us over \$150 billion a year in control and damages! Plus, nearly 50% of our native species listed as endangered or threatened in the U.S. are at risk because of these non-native species, which can multiply and out-compete our native species.



So when you hear of someone who is smuggling "pets" into this country, or buying smuggled pests, you have a right to be very upset! Smuggling illegal pets is more common than you might think. Some of these poachers get caught, like the Australian who tried to smuggle out 31 lizards and faced up to 10 years in prison. A few years ago a person was caught smuggling 600 rare Mexican Red-Kneed tarantulas into the U.S. He faced a sentence of up to 25 years in prison plus a \$1.25 million fine. (The spiders are protected under Mexican law and the U.S. Endangered Species Act.)

It is illegal to bring in any living insect, animal, or plant without a permit. It may seem harmless, but when some of these "pets" get loose, they can become very costly to control, as well as cause environmental havoc.