

Date: July 11, 2013

To: Tenant-Landlord Issues Committee

From: Charlie Breunig

Subject: Background for a discussion of the city's role in educating the public about bed bugs

Prevention and early detection are the key to minimizing bed bug infestations, so Madison needs some kind of public education campaign about bed bugs. This committee should discuss what role the city government can play in such a campaign.

A few quick facts about bed bugs:

- In the last ten years bed bugs have made a strong comeback in the US. So far Madison hasn't been hit as hard as some cities, but we're hearing more and more complaints about them at the Tenant Resource Center.

- It's easy to accidentally bring them into a home. An infestation can start from one bug that hitchhiked in on a suitcase or piece of furniture.

- It's hard to get them out of a home. Bed bug treatment tends to be expensive, often exceeding \$1000, which is a burden on both tenant and landlord. But the earlier an infestation is detected, the cheaper it is to treat it.

- Unlike many other pests, bed bugs are not attracted to unsanitary conditions. They can take up residence in a home that's immaculately clean.

- A large infestation in one unit will spread to other units in an apartment building.

- It's hard to determine the origin of an infestation, therefore it's hard to prove whose fault it is.

- Bed bugs don't transit human diseases and are therefore not considered a public health threat. The Public Health Department will step in if there's a secondary health issue associated with bed bugs in a private residence, for instance if the bites become infected from excessive

scratching, or if a person becomes ill from misusing pesticides.

Bed bug issues we hear about at the Tenant Resource Center:

- Disputes over who pays for the treatment.
- Tenants not reporting bed bug problems because they're afraid they might be evicted.
- Landlords using ineffective treatments.
- Tenants not complying with treatment instructions.
- Reinfestations of apartments after treatment.

A public education campaign should have the following goals:

- Tenants and landlords should know the best practices for keeping bed bugs out of their homes, as well as be able to recognize the early signs of an infestation.
- Tenants shouldn't be afraid to report an infestation to a landlord, and landlords should act quickly and effectively when receiving such a report.
- Tenants, landlords, and pest control professionals need to cooperate with each other when ridding an apartment of bed bugs.