

Toronto Bed Bug Project Update

Date:	November 12, 2008
To:	Toronto Board of Health
From:	Medical Officer of Health
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	

SUMMARY

This report outlines the progress made by the Toronto Bed Bug Project in the development of a multi-stakeholder, city-wide approach to bed bug control in Toronto. This report also provides a number of specific recommendations and describes proposed strategies that are essential to controlling the spread of bed bugs.

Since the inception of the project in March 2008, Toronto Public Health has inspected more than 50 apartment units with severe infestations and more than 38 vulnerable adults have been assisted in cleaning, preparing and treating their units for bed bugs. In doing so, approximately \$17,000 has been obtained from income support programs for apartment specific clean outs and bed bug pesticide treatments.

TPH has also responded to 1444 requests for service and has delivered more than 50 educational sessions on bed bug prevention and control to a number of community organizations and employee groups.

The Bed Bug Project has developed a number of fact sheets and protocols to support affective approaches to bed bug control. These have been posted on the Toronto Public Health web site (www.toronto.ca/health/bedbugs.htm). The general fact sheet has been translated into 14 languages, and translation of the balance is underway.

While the Toronto Bed Bug Project has made substantial progress, the bed bug problem in Toronto requires further development to achieve an integrated, multi-stakeholder prevention and control strategy, with tangled measures to assist vulnerable adults. It is anticipated that the Bed Bug Project will be reporting to the Board of Health in the Spring of 2009 outlining further recommendations and strategies for bed bug control in Toronto.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. City Council approve a request for one time emergency funding of \$75,000 gross and net in the Toronto Public Health 2009 Operating Budget to assist vulnerable adults who do not qualify for Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) support, to purchase services to prepare their residences for bed bug pesticide treatment;
2. the Board of Health request the General Manager, Shelter Support and Housing Administration, to request funding for the expansion of the Bug and Scrub initiative, as part of the 2009 Operating Budget process;
3. this report be referred to the Budget Committee for consideration during the 2009 operating budget process;
4. this report be referred to the Greater Toronto Apartment Association, Municipal Licensing and Standards, the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association and Toronto Community Housing for information; and
5. the Board of Health reiterate its request to the government of Ontario to fund bed bug control initiatives for vulnerable populations as part of their poverty reduction strategy.

Financial Impact

This report includes a request for one time emergency funding in the amount of \$75,000 gross and net to fund bed bug control initiatives for vulnerable adults who do not qualify for OW and ODSP financial support.

The expansion of Bug and Scrub will be the subject of a report from the General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing to the Budget Committee as part of the 2009 Operating Budget approval process.

All other resources pertaining to the Bed Bug project are within current Operating Budgets.

The Acting Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting on February 26, 2008, the Toronto Board of Health endorsed the recommendation from the Medical Officer of Health that an action committee on bed bugs comprised of city divisions, housing providers, health care organizations, social services agencies, community groups, landlord and tenant representatives and other

appropriate stakeholders be established. The role of this committee was to develop a comprehensive action plan to reduce bed bug infestations in the city of Toronto, with particular emphasis on vulnerable populations.

On March 17, 2008, a bed bug forum was hosted by Toronto Public Health at which relevant stakeholders were invited to participate. As a result of this meeting, a Steering Committee and seven workgroups were created and this now comprises the Toronto Bed Bug Project.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

As with many major cities in North America, Toronto is experiencing a resurgence in bed bug infestations. In 2005, Toronto Public Health received 197 requests for service related to bed bugs, and in 2006 this number dropped to 147 calls. However, from March 1, 2008 to October 9, 2008, Toronto Public Health recorded 1444 requests for service relating to bed bugs. Requests for service include provision of general information, inspection requests, insect identification, and presentations.

There is a common misconception that bed bug infestations can be eradicated by simply applying pesticides. However, bed bugs have the ability to build resistance to pesticides. The pest control industry has a limited range of pesticides that can be used safely and these are only effective if sprayed directly on the bed bug. This is often not possible. For this reason an integrated pest management (IPM) approach is the safest and most effective strategy. This approach places emphasis on the least toxic control measures first and the use of pesticides as a last resort.

To implement an effective IPM approach, it is essential that commitment be obtained from all stakeholders, including landlords, tenants, housing providers, and local government agencies. The Toronto Bed Bug Project is in a position to facilitate this approach to bed bug control.

COMMENTS

The Toronto Bed Bug Project:

The Toronto Bed Bug Project is comprised of a steering committee and seven workgroups whose membership consists of staff from Public Health, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, Solid Waste, as well as community agencies, health care organizations, social services, pest management professionals and landlord and tenant representatives.

The research and developmental work takes place at the workgroup level and it is the role of the steering committee to synthesize this work into an integrated plan and to make recommendations to the Board of Health through the Medical Officer of Health.

The seven workgroups are as follows:

- Bed Bug Control Issues
- Public Messaging

- Legislative Review
- Education and Outreach
- Community Based Responses
- Tracking and Monitoring
- Health Issues.

The Bed Bug Project will report to the Board of Health in the Spring of 2009 outlining further recommendations and strategies for bed bug control in Toronto.

Below is a summary of the progress thus far from the workgroups.

Bed Bug Control Issues:

This work group, along with the Structural Pest Management Association of Ontario in collaboration with industry professionals, developed a Bed Bug Treatment Protocol. This protocol contains “Best Practices” and is a minimum standard guideline. It was developed for property managers and landlords and provides information on standards for comprehensive pest control treatments in residential settings.

(See www.toronto.ca/health/bedbugs.htm)

The Structural Pest Management Association of Ontario, in collaboration with members of the Bed Bug Control Issues workgroup, also developed a “Tenant Preparation Protocol”. This document sets out the minimum industry standards for the preparation process prior to the application of pesticides for bed bugs. Proper and thorough preparation prior to pest control application is essential for successful bed bug control. The Protocol was developed for use by landlords, property management companies and tenants. (See www.toronto.ca/health/bedbugs.htm)

Public Messaging:

This workgroup is enhancing the Toronto Public Health bed bug webpage (www.toronto.ca/health/bedbugs.htm) which is currently the second most frequently viewed link on the Toronto Public Health web site. Their work includes:

- Developing additional facts sheets on various topics related to bed bugs.
- Providing fact sheets in a number of different languages (13 languages at this time).
- Providing a description of the Toronto Bed Bug Project.
- Providing information on how to contact a Public Health Inspector for advice on bed bugs.
- Providing information on the Toronto Public Health current response to bed bugs.
- Developing a survey that will be available as a link from the website in which the public can participate by providing essential data regarding their bed bug issues.

To date, the following fact sheets have been developed:

- Bed Bugs – Information for Home Visitors
- How to Manage Bed Bug Infested Furniture
- Bed Bug Management for Paramedics

- How to Submit an Insect Sample for Identification

The group is currently working on the development of five additional fact sheets that will be added to the website once completed. The proposed fact sheets are:

- Travelling and Bed bugs: prevention tips
- Do's, Don'ts, Myths and Facts about Bed Bugs
- Integrated Pest Management Fact Sheet on Bed Bugs
- Pictorial Fact Sheet on Preparation and Prevention
- Bed Bug facts for the Medical Profession.

Legislative review:

This workgroup conducted a literature review of local and international legal approaches in order to develop an appropriate legislative strategy that could support the integrated pest management approach.

Current legislation in Ontario doesn't specifically refer to bed bug infestations. However, where an infestation is severe, Section 13 Orders under the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA) may be issued. Legal enforcement actions are seen as a last resort rather than a primary eradication tool. This is because in most cases, problematic infestations involve the most vulnerable in our community who would be unable to follow through with the Health Protection Order due to financial, mental or physical health limitations.

In addition, this work group is examining the feasibility of a municipal bed bug prevention and control by-law. The by-law would be used in situations where the level of infestation does not warrant a Health Protection Order, but where a landlord or tenant does not cooperate in preparation and provision of pest control treatment.

Education and Outreach:

This workgroup developed a Toronto Public Health Bed Bug power point presentation for use at community events, such as town hall meetings, tenant groups and neighbourhood associations.

The group is planning a series of education days for all Public Health Inspectors and other public health professionals to ensure everyone has up-to-date information and to ensure consistent service delivery. This training will be extended to other interested city divisions upon request.

Community Based Responses:

The group is currently developing a comprehensive resource booklet for agencies and city employees. This booklet will provide key contact information about agencies and organizations that work in the field of bed bug control, including social service and mental health agencies, heavy cleaning companies, pest control companies, home care providers, and furniture suppliers.

A standardized bed bug protocol for shelters, drop-in centers, community agencies and housing providers is being developed. This document will build on existing practices and protocols in shelters and other community agencies and is intended to synthesise and update a number of documents currently being circulated.

This workgroup has also identified the need for a specialized team to be mobilized to deal with the growing number of severe bed bug infestations and where the solution requires long term multi-jurisdictional case management. This would have resource implications.

The group has also identified the need to secure assistance for the most vulnerable in our community to prepare their units for pesticide treatment. To date, there is only one program providing this service (Bug and Scrub – which is described later in this report). Shelter, Support and Housing Administration is currently developing a proposal to enhance this program. It is essential that this program be expanded and that other appropriate agencies be assisted to develop the expertise for this type of work.

Tracking and Monitoring:

While the number of calls about bed bugs received by Toronto Public Health has shown a significant increase in the past 12 months, many infestations are not reported.

The Tracking and Monitoring workgroup was set up to develop a system that will enable Toronto Public Health to gather more comprehensive data on the extent of the bed bug problem in Toronto. To this end, a Bed Bug Survey has been developed that will be posted on the Toronto Public Health web page. The survey will gather information on the types of buildings infested, control measures used, financial implications and the degree of knowledge about bed bugs.

The workgroup is also investigating the feasibility of creating a secure website for the pest control industry which will enable pest control operators to report bed bug activities directly to Toronto Public Health. It is felt that the number and location of treatments by pest control operators in Toronto would be one of the most meaningful statistics in assessing the extent of infestations in the city.

Health Issues:

This workgroup was established to update current information on the adverse health impacts of bed bug infestations, particularly as they relate to vulnerable populations.

Work is currently underway to develop a survey to identify the physical, social and mental health issues seen by staff on the Sherbourne Health Bus. The nurses who work on the Sherbourne Health Bus see many homeless and marginally housed people, who may suffer from secondary infections as a result of bed bug bites. However, the information they provide is anecdotal and is not gathered in a systematic manner. The survey may later be expanded to downtown community health centres and emergency rooms.

The Pilot Projects:

There are currently five pilot projects that have been launched within the City of Toronto. The objective is to design, implement and evaluate methods to control, reduce and prevent bed bug infestations in five communities with specific and distinct challenges and issues. These issues and challenges include dealing with buildings where the tenants speak very little English and where there is an inherent mistrust of government, dealing with large numbers of tenants living with physical and mental health disabilities, and working with tenant groups where personal health and safety and drug use is a reality in their lives.

The district public health inspector along with tenant representatives, property management, community agencies and the workers from Bug and Scrub will develop strategies that work best for each situation. It is hoped that these strategies will form the basis for action templates to be applied across the city where infestations are found in multi-residential buildings.

It is anticipated that the pilot projects will run for approximately 12 months. After this period, an evaluation report will be submitted to the Bed Bug Project identifying successful strategies which can be more widely implemented.

Preliminary Assessment of the Pilot Projects:

While these pilots have only been operating for a short period of time, a number of common issues and challenges have already been identified. These include:

- Improper or lack of preparation by tenants due to physical limitations and mental health issues. In many cases the task of preparing a unit can be overwhelming for tenants.
- Improper disposal of furniture and belongings that are infested with bed bugs, thus causing spread to hallways and elevators.
- Premature disposal of furniture that is infested with bed bugs. Furniture or belongings are frequently discarded where instead, they could have been treated by vacuuming, steam cleaning or laundering. Where furniture needs to be discarded, it must be destroyed upon disposal to prevent it from being reused. Often this is not the case.
- Lack of cooperation and in some cases, poor communication between management and tenants.
- Lack of resources for tenants who do not have the funds to obtain mattress covers, and to launder all of their belongings.
- Units being sprayed several times without successful results.
- Lack of reporting infestations by tenants.
- Tenants performing their own incomplete pest control treatment and exposing themselves to hazardous levels of pesticide dusts and chemicals due to incorrect use.
- Not enough time given by property management to allow tenants to properly prepare for the application of pesticide.

Pilot Project Strategies:

There are a number of strategies that will be implemented and evaluated in the pilot projects. These include:

- Conducting a survey in each building to determine the true extent of the problem.
- Getting all stakeholders involved (i.e. family, friends, tenant groups, social workers and community health officers) to help engage tenants in creating a sense of community within the building and to develop a building specific control strategy.
- Providing a series of educational seminars on how to properly prepare your unit for bed bug treatment with the use of visual aids. Education needs to encompass prevention methods.
- Providing mattress encasements for both the mattress and the box spring to the tenants. Funding for this strategy is currently being sought outside of government.
- Providing free or subsidized laundry services.
- Providing plastic bags for transporting laundry to and from the laundering area.
- Providing vacuum cleaners and hand held steamers on loan with instructions on proper use.
- Pesticide treatment by professionals only, to ensure safe application and appropriate use of pesticides according to the standard protocols for treatment.
- Securing funding for the above initiatives.

Partnerships and Other Accomplishments:

Bug and Scrub:

Bug and Scrub is a Social Purpose Enterprise that was created by the Seaton House Men's Shelter within Shelter, Support and Housing Administration. The program is currently supported through Division's operating budget and more recently funding has been secured through the United Way to further develop the business. Bug and Scrub provides responsible, reliable and cost effective assistance in the preparation of tenant households for bed bug treatment. The enterprise creates real employment opportunities for homeless individuals and assists them in overcoming the barriers that restrict their ability to gain employment and reintegrate successfully back into their community.

Bug and Scrub is currently the only bed bug treatment business of its kind in Toronto. It provides much needed support to those who are unable to prepare their units before effective pest control measures can take place. The support is above and beyond that provided by traditional pest management companies. Bug and Scrub has been an integral part of successful case management approaches for vulnerable people facing bed bug infestations and it is important that initiatives like this be supported and expanded. The men who are employed by this organization as part of the work skills program, are to be commended for a job well done in their continuing efforts to help tenants and other clients lead "bug free" lives.

Ontario Works (OW)/Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP):

Toronto Public Health and Bug and Scrub have collaborated with representatives from Toronto Social Services, OW and ODSP Toronto district offices, to develop protocols and establish working relationships when seeking funds to assist clients who may not have the financial resources to deal with their bed bug issues. This funding is provided on a case by case basis. It is required for furniture/mattress replacement and contracting services such as Bug and Scrub to conduct heavy cleaning, and any other necessary preparation work for successful bed bug treatment. The process to seek funds has been formalized and streamlined for the benefit of clients and has proven to be extremely successful. To date, approximately \$17,000 has been secured through this process to help vulnerable tenants on OW and ODSP who are experiencing serious bed bug infestations.

However, there remain some vulnerable tenants who are not on OW or ODSP and who do not have adequate resources to prepare and treat their units. All partners need to work together to develop a source of emergency funding that can assist these individuals in treating their bed bug infestations. The TPH request for one time emergency funding in this report is the first step in moving forward on this issue.

Soft Goods Recycling Pilot Project – Solid Waste Division:

Toronto Public Health has collaborated in the development of protocols for managing bed bug infested furniture and mattresses for a sorting and recycling pilot project which is aimed at reducing the volume of furniture and soft goods that end up in landfill sites. Once the pilot is in operation, it is hoped that the Bed Bug Project will have some input into the recycling and reuse of furniture.

Woodgreen Bed Bug Manual:

Woodgreen Community Services recently finalized a bed bug manual for use by housing providers and community agencies. Toronto Public Health provided assistance with the manual by providing input on the content and funding the initial printing of the document. Members of this agency and all who contributed to this document should be recognized for their diligence and proactive approach to the bed bug problem.

Educational Supports:

To date, the general Bed Bug Fact Sheet has been translated into 13 different languages and is available on the website: www.toronto.ca/health/bedbugs.htm

In addition, Public Health Inspectors have presented over 50 educational seminars on bed bugs to a wide range of audiences. Further, Public Health Inspectors continue to provide ongoing case management for vulnerable adults living in infested, unsanitary conditions without social supports.

Next steps:

- Expand educational outreach and support to those affected.

- Encourage citizens to report their infestations in a prompt manner to property management.
- Develop best practice protocols for businesses to prevent practices that may be contributing to the spreading of infestations such as selling used furniture and moving furniture.
- Document each of the pilot projects, including the successes, challenges and failures.
- Create templates from these projects that can be applied to other building locations.
- Work with the pesticide industry to lobby for more effective chemical options to treat bed bugs.
- Secure adequate sustainable funding for an integrated bed bug control strategy for Toronto including the Bug and Scrub program.

CONCLUSION

The Toronto Bed Bug Project is pursuing effective ways to address the complex issues related to bed bug infestations. Enforcement actions, such as the use of Section 13 Orders under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, are a last resort and in most cases will not help those who are most vulnerable. Establishing ongoing supports to enable independent living and to prevent re-infestation is more effective.

An integrated pest management approach is the most appropriate strategy for bed bug control, and requires a collaborative effort and coordinated action by many actors. Education of all parties remains a vital element in fighting bed bug infestations.

To this end, the Bed Bug Project will further report to the Board of Health in the Spring of 2009 outlining further progress and recommendations for a comprehensive approach to controlling bed bugs in Toronto.

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