Birmingham City Council

Regulation and Enforcement

Regulation and Enforcement – Pest Control Service

Booklice (or) Psocids Advice Leaflet

These tiny grey insects can be found in and around food cupboards, and especially in dry goods such as flour, milk powder, sugar and semolina. This advice sheet aims to provide you with information on the following:

1. A description of booklice
2. The preferred habitat, life cycle and causes of booklice
3. What can be done to prevent and treat for booklice?

1. A description of booklice

Booklice are common but harmless household pests. They are soft bodied insects which rarely exceed 6mm in length. Normally, they are about 1.5 – 2mm in length, and can lay up to 200 eggs in their lifetime.

2. The preferred habitat, life cycle, and causes of booklice

Most species of booklice are often found in natural habitats such as animal nests, tree trunk crevices, under bark, and on leaves. However, they are also often found in warehouses, food manufacturing premises, granaries, museums, retail and domestic premises. They are particularly common in humid environments as they are associated with damp, and live for approximately 6 months.

Humidity can be caused by new plaster drying out, condensation caused by inadequate ventilation in the kitchen or property, or even leaking pipes. Booklice feed on the mould caused by humid conditions.

Booklice rarely cause damage by feeding and are virtually harmless in small numbers. Larger infestations may cause damage to more delicate materials such as books and furs. The major problem with booklice is the nuisance they cause, as they can contaminate raw or processed foods. Contaminated products must be identified and destroyed, a costly and time consuming process.

3. What can be done to prevent and treat for booklice?

Always keep your foodstuffs, cereals and similar products in cool, dry and well - ventilated places. Clean out your cupboards regularly, and always make sure they are dry before you put the contents back. Make sure the area is well ventilated before boiling water and/or using the washing machine or tumble drier.

If they do appear, remove and dispose of all contaminated food immediately. Check and clean your cupboards and storage areas. Food cans and bottles should be fine, but make sure that there are no insects hiding under labels. Treat the area with a good household insecticide, which is suitable for use near food.

Because of opportunities for the infestation to return, booklice are typically very difficult to treat and control using household insecticides. The most effective method of control is to ensure that the premises are thoroughly cleaned, aired and dried.

Prevention through good hygiene and adequate ventilation is a better method than simply using household insecticides.

REMEMBER: The Pest Control section can offer advice on dealing with and preventing infestations of booklice. Telephone 0121 303 6993 / 6007 for more information or email: publichealth@birmingham.gov.uk.