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NKU dorms keep bedbugs away

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HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - Peter Trentacoste knows bedbugs.

As Northern Kentucky University's director of university housing it is Trentacoste's job to make sure the pests stay out of the school's dorms where approximately 1,850 students live in close quarters.

"In the past four years, we have had less than 10 cases," said Trentacoste. "Only one of those cases ended up spreading beyond an individual room. We are very aggressive in the identification and treatment of these insects.

"Our low level of cases has not occurred by accident. We spend a good deal of time training staff and students on what to look for and how to properly prepare for treatment if a problem is identified."

Recently, Trentacoste was awarded the Most Outstanding Program honor for his presentation related to "Best Practices in Bedbug Management" at the Kentucky's annual College and University Housing Officer's Conference (KAHO) in Louisville.

His award will mean that he'll present to a regional conference in February.

Trentacoste said that international travel and pesticide changes are two reasons for the increase in bed bug activity.

To protect NKU from bedbugs, old cloth mattresses have been replaced by new vinyl ones.

"This process began this summer and will continue next summer to ensure that we haven't missed any replacements that are necessary," he said. "We also encase or cover mattresses that have a minor tear or crack in the vinyl to protect students and also our investment in the mattress."

In high-traffic areas, the school uses a system called Nightwatch. The device heats to 98.5 degrees, mimicking a sleeping person along with a kairomone lure and emits carbon dioxide as if it was breathing. The lure only operates during the night due to bedbugs being nocturnal and monitors for up to seven days on a full tank of carbon dioxide.

"There aren't a lot of ways to protect anyone against bedbugs," Trentacoste said. "They are adept at hitchhiking and can take up residence pretty quickly."

He said NKU's cost to get rid of bedbugs ranges from a hundred dollars for a single room to several thousand for a larger infestation.

"One big cost that managers need to keep in mind is the emotional toll these insects can cause tenants," he said. "This is why we take this issue so seriously and seek to find resolution as quickly as possible."

Trentacoste said those outside a campus setting can take some simple steps to prevent an infestation, but noted that bedbugs can be picked up anywhere people congregate. "They are not confined to hotels, residence halls and other group living arrangements," he said.