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Beware of Booklice Lurking in Structures

As more homeowners are indoors during the cold weather, they might come across a small crawling insect called a booklouse (*Liposcelis* spp.). Despite being called 'lice', booklice are not harmful to people or pets. They get their common name from their association with books or paper. Adult booklice are 1/32 to 1/4 inches in length, wingless and creamy-white in color. They have soft bodies, chewing mouthparts, and long thread-like antennae. Nymphs look like adults, only smaller in size. Their lifecycle from egg to adult occurs in about 3 to 4 weeks.

Most booklice require a relative humidity of at least 50-60%, due to loss of moisture through their exoskeletons. High humidity is also necessary for the growth of their primary food source, mold.

They invade by means of stored goods, groceries, cartons, or on paper. Booklice feed most commonly on molds as well as fungi, grains, and other starchy material, including glue from book bindings. When found indoors, they are found in such places as moldy books and paper, damp places, sweating pipes, new plaster and sheetrock, damp spillage, or wooden pallets. They can live and reproduce in wall voids, storage trunks, groceries, rugs, paper, cartons, rope fibers, closets and cabinets.

They do considerable damage in museum collections, libraries, stored products and food processing plants, when they are found in large numbers. The presence of psocid bodies in house dust is also believed to contribute to asthma attacks. Large populations of psocids does warrant control for these insects.

Some Options For Control:

Reduce moisture, since psocids usually do not survive when humidity falls below 50%. A dehumidifier or fan is effective in reducing moisture. Also repair any moisture problems and store boxes, bags, books, and papers off the floor to reduce contact with moisture. Clean the infested areas thoroughly, and dry items with a cloth or in the sun. Also open windows and doors and turn off any humidifiers, in order to reduce humidity indoors. Sometimes faulty air conditioner systems promote damp, humid conditions, so they should be repaired.

Locate breeding sites such as upholstered furniture, moldy wood, old mattresses, damp papers or books and then remove, treat or discard the items. Also discard infested food or treat it by heating (place in oven at 180°F or for 30 minutes) or freezing (placing in freezer at 0°F for 4 days). Household insecticides containing such chemicals as

pyrethrins, rotenone, allethrin, are labeled for crawling insects or booklouse control and can be used for spot-treating areas of infestations.



Photo of adult booklouse. Photo by Dr. Bart Drees, Professor and Extension Entomologist, Texas A&M University.

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