

Are we doing enough to control cockroach allergies

From Pest Control News 48 - November 1998

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Dr Rick Brenner, the head of a specialist unit of the US Department of Agriculture at Gainesville, Florida, has been working for more than a decade on cockroaches and their control. As he says, "Cockroaches aren't just a social problem, they can also threaten health."

Cockroaches may carry pathogenic organisms that can be passed on to humans through surface and food contamination. The evidence is largely circumstantial although well accepted. However, the evidence about allergens is not. Research by Rick Brenner and other scientists has shown that cockroach faeces, saliva, eggs and outer covering, or cuticles, left behind on surfaces contain substances that are allergenic to humans, especially those with asthma or other respiratory conditions.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the allergic reaction to certain insects and other invertebrates has a profound effect on the lives of many. Reaction to cockroaches is becoming an increasing problem. This is usually because of ignorance. Cockroach allergies are not always recognised as such by those who are suffering from them and even when sufferers do realise, inadequate steps are taken to resolve the problem.

Most pest controllers will be able to get rid of the cockroaches but few will carry out the deep cleaning which is necessary to remove cast skins, egg cases, faeces and general debris from the cockroach. Yet, research at the USDA laboratories at Gainesville has shown that cockroach allergens are still active after 6 years.

So, while the pest controller or householder may think they have eliminated the cockroach problem, it is rare for them to carry out a thorough clean-up of the premises following the treatment. Without this, no cockroach treatment is complete.