DEALING WITH CLOTHES AND CARPET MOTH

Some facts about moths that you may already know…

FACT 1: Adult moths (the flying ones) do not eat anything at all, the females lay eggs after mating and it is the larvae that hatch from these eggs that do all the eating! Moth larvae are beige/cream coloured and they look like tiny maggots.

Tineola bisselliella

FACT 2: Clothes and Carpet moths are the same thing. This family of moth feed on anything that contains natural fibres – including: wool, hair, fur and feathers.

Moth silk and empty pupa

Methods of controlling moth

There are two options available to you when dealing with moth in your home:

- Chemical
- Biological

They both have their downsides and advantages, sometimes a combination of both is going to be the best option.

Establishing the level of a moth population and monitoring it during any treatment is an important part of successfully controlling the moth population, and essential if complete eradication is required.

Chemical Control of moth

This method is probably the one that people are generally most familiar with and one that we may in fact have already tried with the help of our local DIY store, before calling in a pest controller. In short it is using chemical compounds of various kinds and with different delivery systems, for example: an aerosol spray to kill the flying moths, an insect powder to kill the larvae – both contain the same type of insecticide but are delivered in different ways: one with fine liquid particles and the other on dust particles.

A professional pest controller has access to some more potent and longer lasting versions of these chemical pesticides as well as a few more that are not available to the general public, but the active ingredient, or toxic element is virtually the same.

Treatment of a house or flat using these insecticides relies on the insect, at whichever stage in its life cycle, coming into contact with the toxic element of the compound in a high enough concentration to kill it. So for a chemical treatment to be most effective the insecticide needs to be sprayed, pumped or blown in and on as much of the property as is practically possible. If the treatment coincides with a fitted carpet being replaced then access is made possible to the floorboards and under the floor - this will make a treatment more successful, not only because insecticide can be deployed under the floorboards, but it also gives a chance to get rid of all the eggs and moth debris that will be under the carpet. However, excellent levels of control are still achievable with insecticide without removing a fitted carpet.

Signs of moth damage to a fitted carpet

What's involved in a Chemical treatment for moth?

1. First is the most underrated tool in every household when it comes to the control of moth: The vacuum cleaner!
2. Spraying the carpet or floorboards in the case of the removed fitted carpets
3. Using the insecticide dust where possible
4. Using an Ultra Low Volume (ULV) device to create a very fine aerosol of insecticide in all the effected areas of the property
5. Setting up of monitoring traps in every area of the property.

This would be the first part of a moth treatment program using insecticides. A few weeks of monitoring (checking numbers of moth in the traps) would follow and then further "spot" treatments in areas where high numbers are still being recorded. These further treatments would involve some of the elements of the first visit but would be less costly than the first treatment as there should be no need for vacuuming, and they should only be required in specific areas of a house or flat rather than throughout.

Moth eggs and debris under a recently removed stair carpet

What are the Advantages and Disadvantages of Pesticide control of moth?

Advantages:

- Immediate reduction in the numbers of moth and larvae
- Toxic environment created that will continue to kill moth and larvae that emerge after the initial treatment or have managed to survive it.

Disadvantages:

- Introduction of a potentially hazardous substances into human environment
- Efficacy of treatment depends on delivering the insecticide to all areas of a property – which is not always practical (roof voids, under floors and stairs etc)
- Not considered a safe treatment for clothing so is not a complete solution for moth in wardrobes (although can be part of a treatment).

Biological control of Moth

The biological control of moth is relatively new as an application for the types of moth that we find in our homes, but has the potential to provide a very complete solution.

What is it?
This method uses a predatory insect that is virtually invisible to the human eye and one that will seek out and destroy the eggs of the moth. The insect has no effect on the human environment, it will go about its work invisibly and silently and then die off once its job is done.

Trichogramma Evanescens

These insects are introduced into the property as eggs and allowed to hatch into each of the effected areas, whether that be a bedroom or wardrobe or loft they will hatch and go in search of the moth eggs wherever they are.

Will I see them?
This predatory insect is about 0.2 -0.5mm long so as good as invisible to the human eye and small enough to find its way into the tiniest of spaces where moth eggs might have been laid – including amongst clothes!

This seems too good to be true – what are the downsides?
There is one disadvantage with this method of biological control, which may be more significant in the worse infested properties, which is that because the predatory insects only attack the moth eggs, all the larvae that have emerged before the insertion of the predatory insect will have to run their natural course, which means that the effects of starting a course of biological treatment may not be seen for a few weeks.

It may be that the biological control of moth is more of a long term approach to low or medium infestations than an immediate solution to high levels of infestation. It could also be used in conjuction with or a few months after a pesticide treatment - for instance the carpet or floor area of a bedroom might be better off treated with pesticide but the wardrobes with the predatory insects.

Advantages:

- Potential for complete eradication of the moth
- No toxic substances introduced into the human environment
- Moth will be eradicated from inaccessible areas: under floors and fitted carpets, in cellars, lofts and eaves, in cavity walls (wool insulation can harbour moth)
- Will work amongst clothes

Disadvantages:

- Effects will not be seen for a few weeks after commencing a treatment program.
- More visits from the pest controller will be needed to assess and manage the progress of the predatory insect.