



MEDIA RELEASE

2007 – 2008 – 004

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 25, 2007

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X-TERMINATORS: PROVINCIAL AIDS ORGANIZATION MOBILIZES COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO VANCOUVER'S BED BUG CRISIS

VANCOUVER – Numerous Lower Mainland residents, along with members of citizens groups, housing and healthcare organizations, and business representatives packed a meeting room at the Vancouver public library on Monday night to learn more about Vancouver's bed bug crisis, including practical strategies geared towards prevention and control. The free event, coordinated by the BC Persons With AIDS Society and moderated by MLA Vancouver-Burrard Lorne Mayencourt, brought together experts in the areas of environmental health, pest control, housing, health care, and community development, and included with an hour long question and answer period for people in attendance.

"More than 100 inquiries have been received by our Advocacy office—both phone calls and drop ins—over the past year from HIV-infected members seeking information and support about bed bug infestations," said Glyn Townson, Vice-Chair of the BC Persons With AIDS Society, in post-event discussions with the media.

Shelley Beaudet, Senior Environmental Health Officer with Vancouver Coastal Health, was the keynote speaker, outlining the scope and severity of the problem in Vancouver, key contributing factors exacerbating the problem, basic bed bug biology, as well as recommendations for prevention and control. While Beaudet claimed that bed bug infestations pose no public health risk, she admitted that the nuisance factor had increased in severity and reviewed some recent efforts undertaken by Vancouver Coastal Health to minimize the problem.

The first panelist was Sean Rollo, Quality Assurance Manager and Technical Advisor with Orkin Pest Control, who offered tips to reduce the risk of introducing bed bugs into homes and measures to minimize their spread. This presentation was followed by a discussion by Anne O'Neil, Bed Bug Project Manager with the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) in Vancouver's Downtown East Side. O'Neil identified practical and community strategies for dealing with bed bugs, stating that the most effective technique to combat the problem is collaboration: "I have found that the most important factor in getting bed bugs under control is ensuring cooperation between tenants, landlords, pest control services, and the agencies who coordinate funding to treat the bed bug problem."

Dr. Rolando Barrios, Assistant Medical Director at both St. Paul's Hospital's Immunodeficiency Clinic and the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, offered a healthcare perspective on the subject of bed bugs. Although blood-feeding parasites such as bed bugs have never been implicated in the spread of diseases to humans, he explained, they can cause a range of reactions, of varying severity, in humans. Bites from bed bugs can mimic bites from a variety of other insects, he told the audience. Skin reactions are commonly associated with bed bugs, which result from the saliva injected during feeding. Some individuals do not react to these bites, while others present with a great deal of discomfort. Allergic reactions can also range from common large wheals with itching and inflammation, to more severe reactions, including anaphylaxis.

Panel presentations concluded with Martha Lewis, Executive Director of the Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre (TRAC), who reviewed the legal rights and responsibilities of landlords and tenants for dealing with bedbugs. Lewis made an urgent plea for governments to assume greater responsibility for the growing problem of bed bugs, claiming that the issue must be recognized as a public health matter.

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The public meeting also included a full hour Q & A period for community members in attendance to pose more detailed questions or concerns to panelists. BCPWA, along with some of the other participating organizations and groups, displayed and distributed an array of printed information related to the issue of managing bed bugs.

The British Columbia Persons With AIDS Society (BCPWA Society), a non-profit, consumer-driven organization is in its 20th year of operation, is dedicated to empowering persons living with HIV disease and AIDS through mutual support and collective action. As western Canada's largest AIDS organization, with a membership of more than 4,400 HIV+ individuals, the Society provides support and advocacy services, treatment information, and volunteer opportunities to its diverse membership.

MORE INFORMATION: [\[View Poster \]](#)
[\[Further Reading: Bed Bugs \]](#)
[\[BCPWA Advocacy Action Kit: Bed Bugs \]](#)

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PRESENTED BY:

