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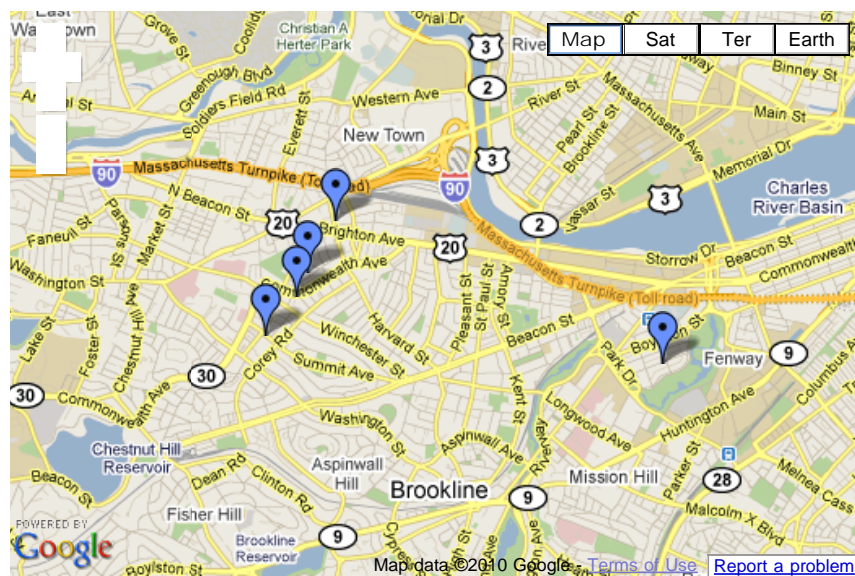
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ALLSTON-BRIGHTON

City aims to take a bite out of bedbug problem

Posted September 9, 2010 08:00 AM

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View [Boston's bedbug problem spots](#) in a larger map

City officials aimed to spread awareness, not bugs, during the early recent heavy move in/out period. Targeted areas (shown in the above map) included blocks on Harvard and Commonwealth avenues, as well as Summit Avenue, Price Road and Queensberry Street.

(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

By Matt Rocheleau, Town correspondent

To bedbugs, Allston-Brighton feels like home, sweet home.

Around Labor Day each summer in this high-turnover neighborhood, streets,

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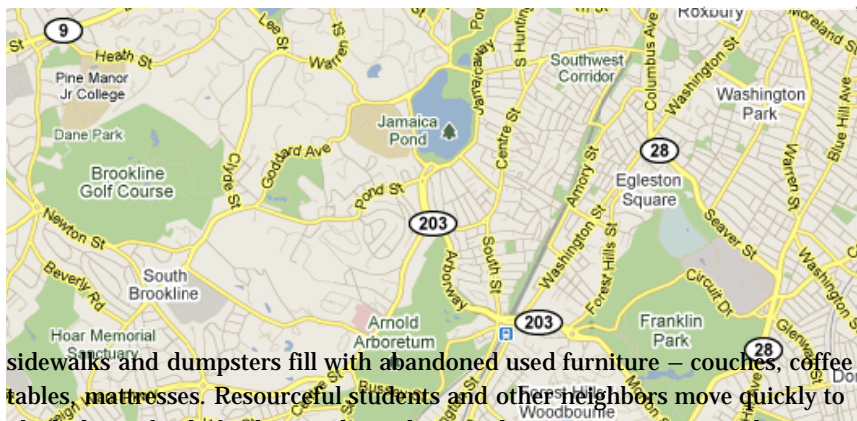
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sidewalks and dumpsters fill with abandoned used furniture – couches, coffee tables, mattresses. Resourceful students and other neighbors move quickly to pluck the curbside freebies and put them in their own apartment or home.

This form of recycling is one of the most common ways bedbugs spread.

Now, city officials hope the combination of a more targeted preventative approach on their part and the large amount of national attention given to bedbugs recently will keep the pesky hitchhiking insect's population from spreading in Allston and other neighborhoods.

For the first time this year, city officials took a more focused approach to warning and educating the city's influx of college students and other newcomers about a rapidly growing bedbug problem in cities nationwide.

Boston landed 11th on [Terminix's list](#) of the most bedbug-infested cities in the country. And among Boston's neighborhoods, Allston-Brighton sent the third most bed bug complaints (41) to city hall in FY 2010 behind Dorchester (46) and East Boston (57). City-wide, the average number of complaints per year has more than doubled, according to data provided by the inspectional services departme

In past years, city workers patrolled streets in early September and slapped bright orange stickers on discarded items to warn residents that they may contain bedbugs. Flyers and other informational packets were also passed out to new residents, students, and students' parents.

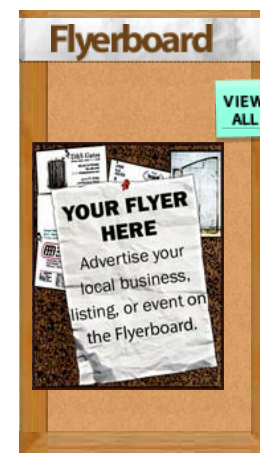
The latest approach, however, has been much more deliberate than ever before as the city focuses its efforts on areas and around buildings that have been prone to bedbug problems.

The areas targeted due to past bed bug trouble include the 100 block of Harvard Avenue in Allston, the 1300 block of Commonwealth Avenue near the Allston-Brighton line, Price Road and Summit Avenue in Allston and on Queensberry Street in the Fenway neighborhood.

"We think it went great. There was a lot of public awareness about it this year,

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and there has been constant press over the past four or five years about bed bugs” said city [inspectional services](#) director John Meaney. Since the big move-in week, there has not been an increase in bed bug complaints he said.

“I think it’s going to be a couple of weeks [before complaints start to rise] with all the moving and furniture the bugs are getting tossed around a little bit,” he added. “But an increase in complaints does not mean an increase in bed bugs.”

Even college students, sometimes described as not being attuned to current events, were well aware of bedbug infestation problems this year, Meaney said.

That increased awareness coupled with students moving in over a longer duration allowed city officials to better officiate the sidewalk chaos.

Suffolk University juniors John Floyd and Kayla Ryan, both 21, moved to Allston last week and during the move they saw plenty of deserted furniture outside, but did not take any in.

“I stay away from [used furniture] for that reason,” said Floyd referring to the bed bugs. “I might consider something that’s made of hardwood, like a desk or a bureau, but not a mattress or couch.”

Because of the higher population density, major cities have been hit hardest by the puny pests, but even Floyd and Ryan, who are not metropolitan natives, were well aware of the problem.

“We’re from New Hampshire, and we knew all about it,” Ryan said.

But even some who knew of the bedbug potential weren’t deterred from free furniture nabbing.

“Some think they’re immune to it,” Meaney said. “And others are overly concerned.”

College students are among the groups most likely to spread bedbugs because students are constantly moving in and out of dorms, apartments and shared homes. Students are also likely to entertain guests on a regular basis, throw parties, and travel internationally.

“It’s not a sanitary issue. [Bedbugs] are in five-star hotels and they’re in slums,” said Meaney, but keeping your residence, clothing, and furniture clean can be beneficial in combating bed bugs.

Bed bugs aren’t a public health threat in that they do not spread disease, but the idea of nearly invisible, hard – and expensive – to eradicate insects

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crawling around you and sucking blood while you're sleeping doesn't sit well with most.

"They can take a psychological toll on people," Meaney said.

For more information on bed bugs, [click here](#), and check out the National Pest Management Association's "[Bed Bug Hub](#)" website.

You can also download the city's bed bug flyer here: [English version](#) or [Spanish version](#), and the [new student informational flyer](#).

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(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

Much of the larger, more tempting items have since been removed from the outdoors, either by the city or resourceful residents, but some leftover move-in trash remains including a microwave, suitcase, and cardboard boxes at the intersection of Brainerd Road and Harvard Avenue in Allston on Wednesday.



Globe file photo

They don't carry diseases, but they sure bite.



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