

## A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING COCKROACH INFESTATIONS IN BUILDINGS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

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A preliminary study has been carried out to try and estimate the scale of cockroach problems in England and Wales, to establish factors of building design that encouraged infestations and to estimate the costs related to cockroach infestations. Information was collected using a questionnaire circulated to a selected sample of metropolitan, urban and rural local authorities across England and Wales and visits made with EHOs to a number of properties infested with the German cockroach, *Blattella germanica*.

Over 80% of responding authorities have properties infested with cockroaches. High-rise (tower blocks) and low-rise flats were the dwellings most commonly infested, followed by terraced housing. The most serious infestations were principally in large conurbations.

Of those authorities with cockroach infestations, 80% indicated that ducted services encouraged infestation, while 70% thought that the type of heating system was important. Other factors which encouraged cockroaches were suggested including; the cleanliness of a dwelling, the number of harbourages, presence of rubbish chutes and type of construction materials.

The worst affected local authorities are spending up to £1m per year on treatments against cockroaches. Additionally, residents are also carrying out treatments with aerosols etc. The total cost for insecticide treatments against cockroaches in England and Wales is estimated to exceed £25m per annum. Some authorities are attempting to modify dwellings, to reduce their infestability, with one authority spending £200,000 on such measures.

Cockroaches have been implicated in asthma and allergies, and they can also act as mechanical transmitters of disease. Although these health costs could not be quantified, they could be substantial. Infestations of cockroaches in domestic dwellings can result in legal action by tenants against local authorities. One authority admitted to incurring costs of over £150,000 per year because of such actions.

This preliminary study has shown that cockroach infestations are widespread in domestic dwellings across England and Wales. Those interviewed feel there is a clear link between features of building design and degree of infestation with cockroaches. As such there is scope for research to modify building design to reduce their infestability.