

May 20, 2010

BED BUG BUSTING BILL

The stigma that bed bugs are only a problem for low-income neighborhoods is waning. And now an Upper West Side lawmaker wants to curb the spread of infestations and alleviate the costs incurred by getting rid of the tenacious pests. Treatments are costly and an extermination process can last months.

“There’s a bed bug outbreak,” said Assembly Member Linda Rosenthal. “It’s an epidemic—East Side, West Side—it’s all over the place.”

Rosenthal introduced a bill requiring landlords to give prospective tenants a bedbug infestation history when signing a lease. Another bill that she sponsored would provide a tax credit of 15 percent, up to \$750, of the cost incurred from replacing clothing, furniture and other household items that are often tossed in the trash when bedbugs are discovered. Though the city requires landlords to pay for extermination in their building, residents are stuck with the bill for dry-cleaning an entire wardrobe and purchasing a new mattress. Renter insurance doesn’t cover bedbug problems because the cost would be prohibitive.

“Often when people move into empty apartments, they find that there are bedbugs,” Rosenthal said. “Some people may allege that tenants bring them, but I think it’s a case of bedbugs are in the walls, in the floors, and they emerge when people move in.”

Bedbugs can live for months without feeding, and they often lay dormant in wood or soft materials until humans arrive and draw them out. They are notoriously difficult to eradicate because they hide so well and multiply quickly.

At this point, the proposed legislation would not cover the sale of apartments or buildings, only rental agreements.—**Megan Finnegan**