



CABLE BUG

The cable bug, a phenomenon only recently recognised, occurs in the built environment in large offices, computer rooms, telephone exchanges etc. The occupants of such buildings receive insect-like bite marks on exposed skin. Extensive investigation of buildings presumed infested with biting insects shows no evidence of any arthropod activity. The phenomenon known as the "cable bug" is the occurrence of high levels of static electricity often generated by people wearing synthetic soled shoes walking on shallow piled polypropylene carpets, the kind often used in offices. People themselves become electrostatically charged and attract uncharged particles of nylon carpets and fibre-glass insulation material which come into contact with their skin. These sharp microscopic fibres set up an allergic reaction on the skin surface causing the characteristic round reddened mark associated with biting insects. Usually fleas or mosquitoes are the first suspects.

The cable bug can truly be described as a regularly occurring but non-existent insect and a phenomenon that affected people cannot readily come to terms with as the allergic marks are so similar to insect bite marks. Insecticide spraying will have no effect except other than to temporarily reduce static and wet down particles which might normally be airborne. Increasing the relative humidity and applying anti-static sprays to carpets can also help to reduce the problem.

In large staff-intensive offices, managers receiving complaints of biting insects which are later rightly identified as the cable bug phenomenon by pest control staff often request the application of insecticidal spray to re-assure staff that the problem is being dealt with. As mentioned previously this application of insecticide is futile, and can lead to requests for repeat applications and then claims of ineffective pest control treatment.

Charnwood Borough Council offers a comprehensive Pest Control Service which includes the insecticidal treatment of fleas and other biting insects at nominal charge. If after investigation cable bug phenomenon is identified, reassurance spraying will not be undertaken but full advice on static reduction and staff education will be given as part of the Council's occupational health role.

If you would like an explanation of this fact sheet in your language or to obtain copies in Braille, on audio tape or large print please contact 01509 634560.

For further information contact:

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