

Pest of the Month Silverfish



Silverfish



Silverfish damage



Silverfish habitat

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Happy New Year!

As you are tucking away all of the Christmas decorations, keep pest prevention in mind. You may be providing pest food and harborage in the way you pack up after the holidays.

Silverfish are a common nuisance pest we have been seeing in schools. Silverfish, or bristletails as some call them, are silver or gray, wingless insects that hide during the day and are active at night. Silverfish are covered with silvery scales and are soft-bodied. They are about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch long and have 3 long appendages in the rear. They have a long tapering body that has been described as having a fish or carrot shape. Silverfish develop slowly and may live for 2-8 years. This insect is a fast runner, can move sideways, and even jump. It is a bit unique in that it continues to molt throughout its life. They prefer dark, damp places and can be found throughout schools, especially in teacher’s lounges and paper storage areas.

Unlike many of us who are trying to watch our figures in the new year, silverfish eat lots of carbohydrates. They also eat proteins and have documentation of cannibalism. They have chewing mouthparts and can survive for weeks without food or water. The preferred habitat is warm (70-85°F) and humid (70-100% humidity). A silverfish will search far and wide for a food source, and once it finds a suitable location, will stay pretty close to the food source. They feed on a variety of items including, paper, fabrics, glue, grains, and dried meats. Their bodies are flattened, so they can live between the pages or bindings of books they are feeding on. Damage from silverfish includes irregularly shaped holes in fabrics or paper items and notches along the edges of book pages or maps. Damaged items may have a yellow discoloration and may have fecal markings. While silverfish prefer to eat paper, they don’t readily feed on things that are often disturbed, and while they may live in newspaper, they don’t prefer to eat it.

What to do when you see silverfish in your school.

The first step in reducing a population of silverfish is sanitation. Silverfish like starches, so crumbs or paper (two common components of clutter) need to be cleaned up.

Note: If you are packing away paper napkins and tablecloths, be sure they are free of crumbs. Also, any decoration made of food items such as baked dough ornaments, macaroni strings, or even pine cones should be packed in sealed plastic containers. This will not only save the items from silverfish damage, but will reduce ant, cockroach, or rodent infestations as well.

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Important papers should be organized and placed into plastic bins or containers. Unneeded papers should be quickly recycled to eliminate additional insect food and harborage. Furniture and carpets should be thoroughly vacuumed. Okay, when is the last time you saw the furniture in the teacher's lounge or coach's office get a good cleaning? After cleaning the inside of a room or building, an outside inspection should be made to check for possible moisture sources. Leaks should be repaired, and mulch should be pushed away from the foundation of the building. Once the area has been cleaned and all leaks repaired, further treatment may be necessary by a pest management professional. If there is a severe infestation, cracks, crevices and bookshelves may need to be treated. Usually books are left untreated. In highly infested areas, a vacuum may be used to reduce silverfish numbers before treating.

Mystery of the month . . .



Bookworm?

Silverfish are not fish and are not worms. They are primitive insects in the order Thysanura. Silverfish are commonly found in dark, damp places and feed on book pages and bindings.

Integrated Pest Management .



2006

We survived everything the year 2005 could throw our way and are ready to plow ahead in 2006. The Brevard County School IPM program has now expanded from three pilot schools to fifteen expansion schools and now is ready to go district and statewide. Like the classroom, each school has a unique personality and a unique pest problem. We gain a great deal of knowledge about pests in school by being able to work so closely with you. Thank you for all of your collaboration.

The Florida School IPM working group will be meeting the first of February to set goals for the year. The successes in Brevard County will be a highlight of the meeting. One goal for the year is a complete overhaul of the School IPM website. Be ready for some great things coming soon.

For more information about IPM in schools, or to view past issues of the Pest Press, please visit <http://schoolipm.ifas.ufl.edu>



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