



Figure 1. Cluttered storage closet



Figure 2. Pest conducive condition.



Figure 3. Classroom clutter



Figure 4. Clutter attracts pests.

Sanitation is Pest Management

As an article was in development for a pest management magazine on clutter and pest control, my computer died. Not even the “blue screen of death.” It went straight to some very bad DOS code (white letters, black screen). Our computer guy came immediately and whisked my CPU unit away. The prognosis was bad. I did have a back-up drive which, in my mind, was supposed to “automatically” back up everything nightly. Not all my files were copied over. I learned a valuable lesson. “Scheduled” is not the same as “automatic”—these back-up programs are “scheduled”, not “automatic”. Which leads me back to clutter.

Clutter. I probably lost hundreds of electronic files that day. Do I really miss them? A few, but I was storing hundreds, maybe even thousands of documents for years that I didn’t need or use. I just did it because I had the storage capacity. The Crash forced me to clean up and out. *Lesson #2: Just because you have the storage capacity, doesn’t mean you have to use it.* That’s the start of clutter--electronic or real-space.

In the original article, I had a list of “things to clean” and how to tackle them. There are many experts who make a living organizing others. That’s not me. The goal of this article is to encourage people to start thinking that **sanitation is pest management**. Just think of what clutter provides to help create pest conducive conditions.

Clutter creates harborage for pests. Harborage allows pests to eat, rest, and reproduce in the privacy and darkness of their own pesticide-free zone. Take a look at the figures to the left. Do these resemble your classroom? Classrooms and storage areas like these prevent the pest manager from properly monitoring for pests and make it very difficult to treat for them.

If you have areas like these, take a close look. Do you find droppings that resemble pepper or coffee grounds? Are there fecal smears on your boxes? Do you have old cockroach egg cases glued to the boxes? What would you see if you looked with a black light? If even thinking that pests have not only been living and reproducing in your stuff, but have been using your collection of papers, boxes, and supplies as a bathroom makes you angry, then take the challenge and organize

Why we should reduce clutter?

Clutter makes it harder to clean. One of the tricks in these reality television organization shows is that they completely “unload” the disorganized room, sort and toss, then “re-load”. *The rule is that everything should have a place.* If you can’t clean thoroughly, a number of negative pest management consequences occur:

1. **Harborage and hiding places for pests.**
2. **Monitoring will be difficult to impossible.**
3. **Targeting treatments will be more difficult.**
4. **Possible alternative food sources remain to compete with any bait applied.**
5. **Sometimes sanitation is the best pest management. Without it, control will be almost impossible. Bed bugs are a good example.**



Figure 5. Adult bedbug.

Whoa, did you say bed bugs?

Sure, ask New Yorkers. They are battling bed bugs not only in hotels, but in schools as well. They are finding them in all sorts of places including, baseboards, furniture, light switches, backpacks and even in books. We all know that bedbugs love clutter, nooks and crannies. Bed bug control is made infinitely more difficult where there is clutter. They can go for weeks without feeding. And yes, I mean control and not just management. I don’t know of anyone who will accept a “suppression” of bed bugs as acceptable pest control. Bed bugs will *not* be controlled with insecticides alone.

Besides not providing a place for pests to harbor, reducing clutter will also increase the cleanliness of the room. For one, you won’t have the pest droppings and shed skins to deal with and two, when things are organized and in their place, the custodial staff will have an easier time with dusting and floor care.



Are you the clutterbug of your school?

Do you still hold on to that box of pencils from 1965 or the prom napkins from 1993? Do you have a box of magazines and newspapers that are starting to crumble from old age?

Ask a parent group or local store to sponsor a competition among your teachers and staff. Classrooms and storage areas can be tagged with the clutterbug. Tagged areas would then receive plastic bins to encourage clutter reduction.

Reduction in clutter = Reduction in pests.



Figure 6. Clutter free classroom.



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