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Why are cockroaches a concern?

The presence of native cockroaches outside, usually inside leaf litter, are natural part of the biodegradation ecocycle of organic matter. However, when certain cockroach species enter dwellings and buildings, it is undesirable because of the potential for food spoilage, biting, public perception, contamination, physical damage of structures and transmission of disease. Cockroaches feed on decaying organic matter including faeces and refuse which makes them a potential vector of bacterial and viral diseases.

Which cockroaches are a problem in the City of Karratha?

The cockroaches that are most commonly encountered within the City are the introduced species namely the German cockroach (*Blattella germanica*), the Brown Banded cockroach (*Supella longipalpa*), the Oriental cockroach (*Balella orientalis*) and the larger American cockroach (*Periplanetta americana*). These cockroaches have different characteristics and slightly different lifecycles but all these species have an ability to enter buildings including dwellings, which can be a cause of concern.

Who is responsible for the management of cockroaches?

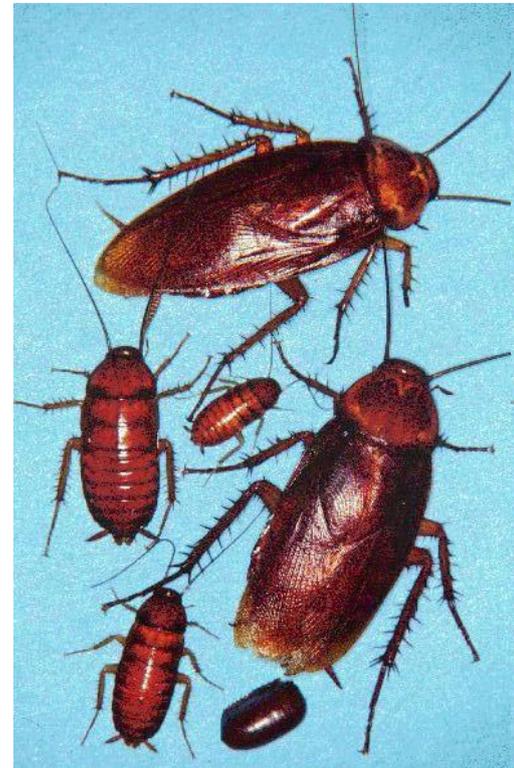
Cockroaches under favourable environmental conditions can multiply prolifically and like many urban pests can be very difficult to eradicate or manage. The owner or occupier of a premises is responsible for the management of vermin on their property. Local Health Laws and food hygiene regulations for commercial food businesses require owners or occupiers to take effective measures to discourage and manage vermin such as cockroaches.



German cockroaches, to the left, and the larger American cockroaches, pictured on the right, showing adults juvenile cockroaches (nymphs) and their egg cases.

The egg cases, called oothecae, can contain up to 20-40 viable eggs and a cockroach can produce 3-4 generations per year.

Therefore, it is easy to understand how large infestations can become quickly established in optimum conditions unless adequately managed.



Photos : Courtesy of Pest Education Services and Training

What are the signs of the presence of cockroaches?

Cockroaches are very shy. They are deterred by strong light and have acute sensory organs that can detect even minute vibrations. As soon as the cockroach senses the presence of a potential predator eg human they hide and therefore seldom seen during the day unless there is an infestation or are flushed out of their hiding place.

If you see activity during the day it is generally indicative of a severe problem. Signs of the presence of cockroaches include:

- Presence of small speckled droppings in cupboards and under appliances.
- Presence of cockroach egg cases (oothecas) often found in dark cupboards especially attached to wooden surfaces.
- Musty smell where heavy infestations exist.
- Seeing live cockroaches especially inside cupboards and in dark areas during the day.
- Evidence of holes from chewing such as paper and cardboard.
- Live cockroaches in sewerage systems and in grease traps

Why do cockroaches enter a premises or place?

Cockroaches, like all vermin, are opportunistic creatures. They will not generally inhabit any place where their needs for survival are not adequately catered for which are shelter, warmth, moisture and food. The presence of high numbers of cockroaches in an area, building or dwelling is generally indicative of inadequate or poor hygiene practices where their essential needs are being met.

How do I manage cockroaches?

Good hygiene and tidy housekeeping will generally discourage cockroaches. Cockroaches can survive on surprisingly minute amounts of food and water and are adaptable to many situations. If a cockroach infestation is suspected it is recommended that you:

- Thoroughly clean and sanitise all surfaces where you suspect activity. You may need to empty cupboards and clean all utensils that may be contaminated by cockroaches.
- Thoroughly clean and sanitise areas under appliances such as microwaves, toasters, ovens, fridges and freezers of dirt and food scraps.
- Ensure wooden surfaces are sanitised eg the underside of domestic kitchen cupboards.
- Clean away dead cockroaches, if they are there, egg cases and other dirt.
- Maintain a high standard of hygiene by not leaving food out, dirty dishes, unsealed bins or pet food out especially overnight which can provide a food source.
- Do not bring unnecessary material into the premises: cockroaches have a tendency to lay their egg cases inside the corrugations of cardboard boxes which can later, hatch inside the building.
- Seal entry points around the building such as drains without covers, floor drains without flaps and under doors.
- Only after your premises has been cleaned and sanitised should you apply a residual pesticide registered for cockroaches (ensure that you read the application label on the product and heed the label)
- Alternatively employ a pest management professional to apply residual treatments or new generation cockroach gel formulations which are very effective if applied correctly.
- Remember a quick fix by spraying cockroaches or most insect pests inside a dirty or inadequately cleaned premises is unlikely to be effective and is no substitute for a high standard of hygiene.

Additional Information

If you would like additional information on cockroaches or other urban pests, please contact the City of Karratha Environmental Health Services on 9185 8555

If you need more information about any matter raised in this document, please contact the City of Karratha's Environmental Health Service on 9186 8555.

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