

Pests can be a nightmare for urban homeowners

While moving to the suburbs may seem like utopia for those who have spent their life in high density urban areas, many homeowners are unaware of some of the pitfalls.

Many suburban housing developments are located next to natural areas that tend to be habitat for wildlife such as raccoons, mice and birds.

Throughout the day and night many of these animals will make their way into residential neighbourhoods looking for food or shelter.

With that comes the potential for damage to homes.

Jeffrey Brookfield, of AmeriSpec Home Inspection Service in Georgetown, Ontario sees more and more of this issue as families look to live near nature.

"People have to understand that they must coexist with the natural environment, but at the same time take precautions to prevent damage to their homes," he said.

"We see many instances of mice and bird activity in attics, primarily the result of improper flashings and sealing of openings around the exterior of the house. Many of the actions required by the homeowner are minor in cost, but it takes some time to visually inspect your property at least once a year to look for possible areas of entry by pests."

Not only is the thought of having pests in your attic unnerving, but birds, bats and mice can cause destruction to

the insulation and structure of the house. Mice and bat droppings can also cause health issues for the homeowner.

Some of the more common types of building damage caused by animals include:

- Shingle deterioration can occur if animals continually walk across a roof or if persistent bird excrement is present.

Raccoons can actually tear shingles off a roof to gain attic access; other animals access attics by damaging soffit/fascia or roof vents.

In addition, resultant water entry into a home through very small openings caused by pest intrusion can cause many problems ranging from cosmetic damage to interior finishes to wood rot of structural framing, if moisture persists for extended periods of time.

- Significant structural damage. Wood boring insects such as termites, powder post beetles, or carpenter ants can cause significant damage to wood structures in a home. Unfortunately, this damage is often hidden behind walls and is not detected for a long period of time and after pest infestation has occurred.

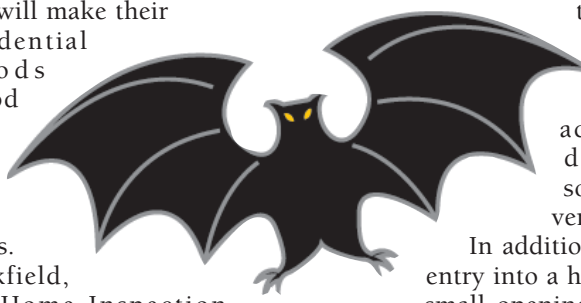
- Damage to attic insulation. Larger animals such as raccoons compress insulation when rummaging about in an attic, in some cases to 25% of the original thickness. This greatly reduces the air spaces in the insulation materials and makes the insulation less effective.

Following pest removal, compressed insulation should be carefully "fluffed" or in some cases retrofitted with additional insulation, to restore/improve energy efficiency in this area.

AmeriSpec Home Inspection Service, founded in 1987, is a recognized indus-

try leader, and is currently doing an average of 150,000 inspections each year.

For additional information, call AmeriSpec Home Inspection Service, 360 Guelph Street, Suites 49 and 5 Georgetown, 905-838-3000, jbrookfield@amerispec.net www.amerispec.net/lma



Health and safety consequences of having pests invade your home

Several health and safety concerns associated with pests are summarized below.

- Mice and other rodents can chew through electrical wire sheathing and pests sometimes build nests or hives in electrical panels, creating a potential electrical safety issue that may be a shock hazard or cause a fire.

This emphasizes the importance of responding quickly to control/remove pests at the first sign of pest activity in a home. Licensed electricians should also be consulted if repairs to electrical systems are required.

- Bird or rodent nests built in chimney/exhaust flues can go unnoticed through the summer, but when colder fall nights arrive, the nests can prevent proper venting and cause combustion gases from appliances to back up into the home, causing harmful exhaust gases (such as carbon monoxide) to enter the home.

To enhance safety, proper spark

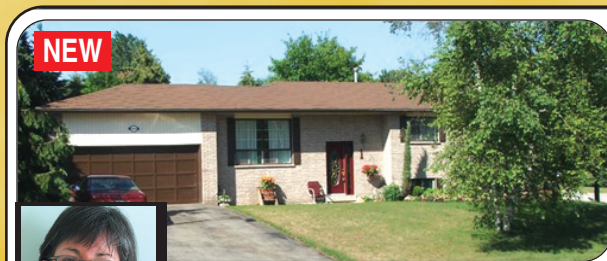
arresters should be installed at the peak of all chimney flues to prevent pest entry and chimneys should be inspected annually by a qualified contractor to ensure there are no blockages in the chimney.

- Certain bird and bat feces can grow a fungus that is toxic and causes a disease called histoplasmosis, a potentially serious illness. If bird/bat feces are present in an attic, it should be left undisturbed or removed by a qualified contractor who will have protective clothing and who will be able to dispose of the waste safely and properly.

- Holes that are created when an animal enters a building often create pathways for moisture to enter into a building's attic, walls, etc. The moisture may be concealed and unable to dry for long periods of time.

This environment is ideal for mould growth, which could potentially be a health concern, especially if residents have mould allergies.

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