

Bedbugs an issue at Chorey Park



By Jimmy LaRoue

Published 9:52 pm Friday, July 19, 2019

Bedbugs have been “an uphill challenge” at the Chorey Park Apartments for at least the past several months, but the executive director of the Suffolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority believes it has gotten a handle on the issue.

The problem was first found in one of the community rooms of the building about two months ago, according to authority Executive Director Tracey Snipes. She said bedbugs have been a sporadic issue for about a year.

Chorey Park is located on West Constance Road and houses vulnerable populations such as the elderly and disabled.

Upon finding the problem in the community room, Snipes said, the authority received several additional complaints from residents, so it had Suffolk Pest Control inspect the building. It found that 16 of the building’s 100 apartments either had bedbugs or bedbug casings.

Suffolk Pest Control then sprayed all 100 apartments, and then followed up about three weeks later, with four of the 16 still having evidence of bedbugs, Snipes said.

Following training on newly acquired heat machines, she said, they will be tested on two of the four apartments that still have the bedbug casings.

“Yes, there are some issues, but that building is not infested (with bedbugs),” Snipes said. “As we are made aware of the issue, we are addressing it.”

Snipes said “every now and then,” the authority will find an issue with bedbugs in one of its communities, “but it’s not like this.”

Despite what Snipes said is being done to address the bedbugs being found at Chorey Park, the sister of one resident remains frustrated about the pace of the cleanup.

Veronica Hall, the sister of Chorey Park resident Donte’ Hall, said the bedbugs have been an issue in her brother’s apartment since at least January. However, she and members of her family only became aware of the problem July 1 when they found a Jan. 29 letter from the housing authority in his apartment.

She said his apartment was supposed to be treated with a heat machine Wednesday to stop the bedbug infestation, but that hasn’t happened. Instead, the apartment was chemically treated July 10, she said, but the bedbugs are still in other parts of the building.

“I am extremely upset the city of Suffolk is aware and does nothing,” she said.

Snipes said the authority hasn’t yet started to use the machines. “We’re still getting our staff trained on it,” Snipes said.

Bedbugs an issue at Chorey Park

-continued



By Jimmy LaRoue

Published 9:52 pm Friday, July 19, 2019

Veronica Hall said it was while emptying her brother's apartment of the items in it that she and her sisters walked down the stairs and found bedbugs throughout the stairwell.

At that time, she spoke with other residents, one of whom she said let her photograph the bedbug bites on his head and leg. About a week later, she contacted the property manager about it.

A second letter was sent to her brother July 8.

"Management has received information that an act was permitted that is in violation of your lease agreement with Suffolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority," the letters state.

The Jan. 29 letter asks that he "be cooperative in the treatment."

However, Veronica Hall said her brother, who has autism, was not aware of the letter. She said the housing authority had agreed to send correspondence about her brother and his unit to their mother, but her mother did not receive the letter.

She said that last week, while her mother was at Hall's apartment to clean it, she found the Jan. 29 letter.

That letter stated that he was obligated to have the apartment "free of rodent or insect infestation." It also said an appointment was scheduled for Feb. 13 to treat her brother's apartment.

It outlined the treatment the housing authority planned to use, and stated it would treat the living room and the bedroom. It said his lease would terminate March 15 if he did not cooperate, and that if he wasn't prepared for the treatment, it would result in a \$150 charge "as well as the termination of your lease."

The July 8 letter stated that Donte' Hall was in violation of the housekeeping standards spelled out in his lease. It said he would be evicted Aug. 7 if he didn't comply with the treatment plan for his apartment, but said if he did, "you will correct the breach (sic)," which has to be fixed by July 29. That letter also said the treatment would take place at 2 p.m. July 11.

"The treatment is a two stage treatment, the steam will kill the active adult, and the chemical is growth regulator which will stunt the growth of the juveniles and egg larvae," both letters stated. "If the bedbugs cannot grow to adult stage, they cannot feed and if they cannot feed they will die. What this means is that you will still see live bed bugs crawling around. It can take up to four weeks for all of the bugs to die. However, if you feel after a few weeks that you are still being bitten please notify us immediately."

Bedbugs an issue at Chorey Park

-continued



By Jimmy LaRoue

Published 9:52 pm Friday, July 19, 2019

Snipes said the city's Health Department has done training with residents about bedbugs, and in the letters given to residents, they ask that they clean the apartment prior to treatment. She also stressed that the authority will not put anyone into an apartment that has bedbugs.

"I don't think that the majority of our residents are having this issue," Snipes said. "There are some, and I'm not trying to minimize those who are. ... When we give anyone an apartment, when someone moves into a unit, they do not have bedbugs."

Snipes acknowledged that there could be misunderstandings with regard to the issue, or that some residents may not comprehend or be physically able to clean the apartment adequately prior to having the bedbugs treated. And while she said the agency aims to show compassion for residents, it can be difficult when the same problems re-occur in the same place.

"It's really one of those rock-and-a-hard-place issues," Snipes said. "We have come for everyone in the building, but there are those who we are having to treat over and over and over again. ... At some point, the resident has to do their part."

Snipes said when the 100 apartments were sprayed, it cost the authority about \$150 for each one, or around \$15,000, and residents are not charged for the treatment. She is hoping that its recent purchase of two heat machines, like those used at the Norfolk Housing Authority, will lower costs should the issue flare up again.

She is asking for residents to speak up if they see bedbugs in their apartments.

"People are afraid to deal with it," Snipes said, "but we can't fix what we don't know."

The authority's Board of Commissioners is scheduled to receive a briefing on bedbugs at Chorey Park at its Tuesday meeting.