

Cockroaches in rubbish chutes



Fogging rubbish chutes is not getting to the root of the problem.



The familiar rubbish chute tray.



German Cockroaches have taken residence in this rubbish chute.

One of the main conveniences of living in high-rise apartments in Singapore is the disposal of garbage down the rubbish chute.

All you do is to wrap the garbage in grocery bags and then drop them into the tray for a free-fall. So it seems.

Most of these bags burst like balloons before they even hit the trolley bin at the bottom of the rubbish chute. This means that food becomes readily available to cockroaches and rats.

Normally we are not aware of the presence of these pests, until they somehow find their way into our apartment, yes, via the same rubbish chute. Or they greet us late at night when we walk to the ground floor lift lobby.

Recently pest management operators have noticed the increasing presence of the German Cockroaches, *Blattella germanica*. Historically these unpleasant surroundings were inhabited by the more common American Cockroach, *Periplaneta americana*.

This is cause for concern because these smaller size species are able to invade the premises through small cracks and crevices. German Cockroaches are prolific with the adult female producing up to 384 off-springs in 180 days. Once they have moved into an apartment, it will be extremely challenging to evict them, as restaurant operators will tell you. The University of Florida reported that allergens left by cockroaches may be worse than the pests themselves because they can trigger asthmatic attacks in children.

Based on tests conducted on field-collected cockroaches, Professor Lee Chow Yang from Universiti Sains Malaysia

found that the German Cockroach has developed a high level of resistance to synthetic pyrethroids in Singapore (Chai & Lee: Insecticide Resistance in *B. germanica* from Singapore, April 2010). This is the most common group of insecticides used in the treatment of rubbish chutes, mainly because it is cheap.

In the short-term it helps if insecticide rotation is practised and treatment includes spraying onto the walls of the rubbish chute from the top floor, followed by fogging on the ground floor.

In the long-term the building authorities, working on new generation eco-friendly buildings, should consider disallowing the installation of rubbish chutes. Residents should bring their garbage in bags downstairs to central bins, separated into recyclables and non-recyclables. Promoting this as a cool lifestyle is a positive way to encourage reduction, reusing and recycling.

The benefits are no smelly rubbish bin openings on the ground floor and lower conservancy charges because this is no need to pay a premium for cleaning and treating rubbish chutes. Regardless of whether they are locals or foreigners, presently the crew clearing the trolley bin face the risk of injury as the garbage continues to rain down.

Politically this will be a challenging concept to sell, especially when we have all been brought up to throw our garbage down that chute, instead of out of the windows. But if left unchecked we will be building communities of German Cockroaches that will easily out-number the human residents in each block or tower.