



Carpet pile affects pesticide penetration



Carpeting provides a cozy, protected environment for dust mites, carpet beetle and clothes moth larvae, and flea larvae. The fibres in carpets absorb moisture from the air, providing much needed humidity for mites and larvae.

The cut, shape, and height of the carpet pile can make it more or less suitable for pest development, and can greatly affect the ability of insecticide to penetrate through the fibres. Carpets can be straight or twisted pile, cut or loop pile, or woven pile. For example, the loose, floppy strands of a cut pile carpet make it difficult to treat with insecticides. Plush and velvet carpets have short, uniform, dense pile that resists dirt but also resists penetration of liquids, including insecticides.

Most of the insecticide from a fine fan spray (more than 95%) stays in the top 1/3 of the carpet pile. This is a concern because the larvae that we find in carpets are found at the bottom of the pile not near the top of the carpet. In fact, flea larvae spend 80% of their time clinging to the base of fibres at the bottom of the carpet pile. One reason for this is that their primary food source (dried blood in adult flea faeces) drops through the carpet fibres to the bottom. The base of the pile also has higher humidity and offers greater protection from a vacuum.

Contrary to common belief, increasing the application pressure does not improve the penetration of the spray into the carpet. In fact, research by Dr. William Robinson has shown that it can have the opposite effect since high pressure increases the number of small droplets produced which are more likely to drift away from the carpet rather than penetrate it. Spraying closer to the carpet doesn't help penetration much either.

So, what can you do to reach the larvae at the bottom of the carpet? Technique is probably more important than pressure and spray height. Make sure that you overlap your spray swaths enough to cover the carpet uniformly. As larvae move around in the carpet and when flea larvae move up higher in the pile to pupate, they will be exposed to residual near the top of the carpet pile. As people walk on the carpet, some residue will drop to the bottom. On the other hand, vacuuming will remove some insecticide residual.

The best method to use to ensure penetration of your treatments is to evenly rake the carpet pile with a clean plastic garden rake to distribute the applied chemicals into the carpet pile and it is also important to select the correct formulation like a wettable powder or micro encapsulated product to ensure a longer residual action.

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