

Some people find to their dismay their food cupboards and especially dry goods such as flour, milk powder, sugar or semolina, have become infested with tiny grey insects. They naturally, but wrongly, assume that the products themselves are at fault. The purpose of this leaflet is to explain the presence of these insects, known as psocids, and to tell you how to prevent them.

Psocids are common but harmless household pests, smaller than a pinhead (usually about 1 – 1.5 mm long) that are attracted to dry powdery type foods. They do not like the light but prefer to live in dark, warm humid places such as the folds of packaging in food cupboards. They can live for about six months and in that time a female will lay up to 200 eggs.

At the same time, research has shown that the sorts of psocids (there are many different types) found in homes are never found where food is produced. So they are very unlikely to be brought into the home in food.

Psocids are always associated with high humidity. It could be caused by new plaster drying out, it could be condensation from not having enough ventilation in the kitchen, it could be a leaky water pipe. There are many reasons but you can be sure that if you have psocids, you have humid conditions.

To prevent psocids always keep your dry foodstuffs, cereals and the like, in a cool, dry, well ventilated place. Clean out your cupboards regularly but if you use water, always make sure that they are completely dry before you put the food back. When you are cooking or boiling the kettle or even just using the washing machine or tumble drier, make sure that the kitchen is properly ventilated.

Control Measures

Remove the affected food immediately and dispose of it outside. Check everything else in the cupboard. Food in cans and bottles will still be alright but make sure that there are no insects hiding under the labels. Treat the infested area with a good household insecticide which is suitable for use near food. Clean out all the dust crumbs etc, then make sure the cupboard is completely dry.

Having done that, find the cause of the humidity and cure it. But remember, prevention is better than cure. Always store dry foods in a cool dry place.

If insecticides are used you should follow the instructions carefully.

For advice and leaflets on a wide range of household and garden pests, visit our website at

www.eastbourne.gov.uk/pestcontrol