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To the editor:

Leslie Earnest's story about the resurgence of bedbugs in southern California ("Bedbugs tuck into Southland," August 13, 2007) touches on an emerging public health issue- the overuse and misuse of chemicals to control pests. The conventional response to pest infestations in homes is to spray chemical pesticides. Unfortunately, there are several major problems with using pesticides in the home, including health risks to residents -- particularly children -- and the development of resistant strains of pests, i.e. super bugs.

One might ask, then, how do you rid your home of these super bugs?

Public health and environmental agencies, as well as some pest control companies, have begun promoting a more comprehensive approach to pest infestations called Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Where typical methods of pest control turn first to chemical controls, IPM seeks to determine why and how pests are becoming a nuisance, and to fix the underlying conditions of the problem.

When battling bedbugs, for example, an IPM approach may look something like this: daily vacuuming of the mattress and bedroom furniture; cleaning of bed linens in hot water; moving your bed away from the wall; sealing the crevices in the windows and walls in your bedroom; and, as a last resort, silica gel dusts. This approach has proven to be successful vs. bedbugs.

Thus, if we want to keep the familiar refrain "Don't let the bedbugs bite" a cute, sweet remembrance of our childhood and not a real world nightmare- everyone must begin employing safer, more earth-friendly approaches to pest control!

Sincerely,

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