



South Somerset District Council

The Council Offices, Brympton Way, Yeovil, Somerset, BA20 2HT
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**Food and Safety Unit
Environmental Health**

Psocids

From time to time people find that their food cupboards have become infested with tiny grey or brown insects. These are often found on the packaging of dry goods such as flour, milk powder, sugar or semolina. It is natural, but often incorrect to assume that the products themselves are always at fault. The aim of this leaflet is to explain what these insects are and how best to prevent them.

What are Psocids?

Psocids – or booklice – are common but harmless insects between 1 and 2 mm long, which can survive in dry powdery foods. They are not caused by poor hygiene and are just as common in the cleanest of homes. They dislike light or disturbance and prefer to live in dark, warm, humid places – such as the folds of packaging in food cupboards. They feed on a wide variety of dry food products - such as flour - and also the microscopic moulds that develop in humid conditions. They may live for about 6 months during which time the female may lay up to 100 eggs.

Appearance

Adult sizes vary according to species. They are 1–2 mm long and are pale yellow–brown or grey to dark brown in colour.

Nymphs are very small and often appear to be transparent.

What causes them?

They prefer areas with high humidity but can tolerate dry conditions for some days. The kitchen is likely to provide the conditions they need and fitted cupboards provide darkness, which attracts them. Some food products, including flour, naturally contain some moisture. (Moisture in the home can be caused by not having enough ventilation in the kitchen or bathroom.) In warm conditions they can rapidly increase in number. This is most likely to occur during the summer months when temperatures are higher, leading to their discovery in autumn.

Prevention and cure

It is best to keep all dry foods in ventilated cool cupboards. If this is not possible, make sure that your cupboards are free from condensation and damp. If you notice that condensation occurs when you are boiling the kettle or cooking, open a window or fan to help with ventilation. Try not to place your kettle underneath a cupboard.

If you discover any insects do not use insecticide as this may contaminate your food. Instead throw away in your outside dustbin any affected food, empty the cupboard and clean with a dry cloth or use a vacuum cleaner with an attachment (remembering to empty the vacuum into the bin outside). Make sure the cupboard is completely dry and free of any insects before replacing any food (this could take a few days).



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Points to remember to avoid psocids

- Keep kitchen and food cupboards ventilated and dry
- Check cupboards regularly and use foods in order of best before date
- Store dried foods, especially powdery food such as flour in containers with tight fitting lids
- Check packaging isn't damaged when you buy your food
- Check the food on opening to ensure that it is not already infested

For more information contact:

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