



## Hawaii closes state's largest airport due to infestation of bed bugs, thanks to "robocleaners"

### Description

An infestation of bed bugs has forced the Daniel K. Inouye International Airport (HNL) in Honolulu, Hawaii to shut down for deep cleaning. HNL, the largest airport in Hawaii, is a high-traffic airport that sees 73,000 passengers arriving daily from many locations around the world.

On May 29, the *Hawaii Department of Transportation* (HDOT) said it received reports that a swarm of bed bugs was spotted inside Terminal 2 – home to airlines such as Delta, United, American and Southwest. The agency had to close down and sanitize three gates at the terminal and "remove items they thought had attracted the bugs."

The following day, a Southwest Airlines manager spotted more of the bed bugs, collected a sample and contacted HDOT, which confirmed the samples to be bed bugs. HDOT staff deep-cleaned the area again, including yanking off carpets from the floor and cleaning them at a high temperature while applying a nontoxic spray.

"Following best practices, we are closing the three affected gates tonight and a pest control company will apply preventative control measures," HDOT said, adding that it will continue to close the gates intermittently over the next three weeks to do additional cleaning to keep the bugs from returning.

As per Hawaii's *Disease Outbreak Control Division*, bed bugs are transmitted from place to place as people travel. "They can be in the seams and folds of luggage, overnight bags, folded clothes, bedding, furniture or anywhere else they find a place to hide," the team explained.

Bed bugs are a pest known for leaving red welts all over the body, according to the *Environmental Protection Agency* (EPA). Although the species is predominantly nocturnal, they can be out during the day if they are hungry. These bugs commonly [hide in mattresses and other materials with crevices](#), and people have found them in hotels, AirBnBs and even schools.

"Experts believe the recent increase in bed bugs in the United States may be due to more travel, lack of knowledge about preventing infestations, increased resistance of bed bugs to pesticides and

ineffective pest control practices,” the EPA’s website states.

## HNL entrusted sanitation of the airport to robot cleaners

Prior to the bed bug infestation, HDOT announced in December 2022 that it decided to integrate two automatic floor cleaners that are meant to supplement janitorial services for HNL. According to the department, the “robocleaners” are capable of performing relatively basic duties that will help HDOT keep the airport clean with an open feel.

“The robotic scrubbers will help us keep HNL sanitary and sparkling,” explained HDOT Deputy Director of Airports Ross Higashi. “The use of this technology will also allow us to maximize available staff in maintaining our busiest airport to standards.”

“The first robotic scrubber is already deployed in our 230,000 square foot Mauka Concourse,” Higashi added. “We are excited to continue training staff and getting the second unit out on the floor.”

After the latest “sanitation” incident, critics are speculating airport staff may be depending too much on these robots and that the mechanical cleaners may be unable to properly deep clean terminals, especially seats and other airport installations where travelers usually rest and place their luggage.

HDOT spent \$157,000 for the two automatic floor cleaners, including the necessary training of staff members to supervise them. Back then, HDOT said these are only the beginning of seeing “robocleaners” as more will be on their way to other concourses soon. Given how they have been unable to prevent the bed bug infestation, time will only tell whether HDOT will maintain its course and keep relying on robots to avoid pest outbreaks.

Watch the video below that talks about how chlorine dioxide could [kill and control infestation of bed bugs](#).

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### Category

1. ECO-Climate-Environment
2. Main
3. Science-Tech-AI-Medical & Gen. Research

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