

Statement of
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Taking Toxics Out of Maryland's Health Care Sector
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Good morning.

What we are here to talk about today is extremely important because it represents the future of pest management in health and elder care facilities. A future based on the recognition that people served by these facilities do not need to be exposed to toxic pesticides as a negative by-product of pest management- meant to protect people's well-being.

Pest management in health care facilities in MD is in the process of a paradigm shift- from a historical reliance on pesticides to reliance on non-chemical pest prevention. This shift to safer pest management is a critical aspect of MD's health care industry's growing commitment to greening their facilities and ensuring an environment free of pests and hazardous pesticides.

You may have noticed an article in Saturday's Baltimore Sun noting the release of a report by MD state health and environmental officials, stating that while MD has made great strides in reducing lead paint poisoning amongst children and improving outdoor air quality- that more needs to be done to keep track of other environmental hazards and their links to children's health – including pesticides.

Pests can pose serious health problems. Flies can carry infectious diseases- like staph and e-coli. Roaches can trigger asthma and rodents can transmit various viruses- such SARS and the Hanta virus.

However, pesticides- often used in conventional pest control as a first line of defense also pose a health risk –especially to the vulnerable populations served by health and elder care facilities, from the new born to the elderly, people with serious and life-threatening illnesses, who have compromised, or in the case of children, immature immune systems- people who are at greater risk of serious illness from exposures to disease-carrying pests as well as toxic chemicals.

A growing body of research links pesticides to such serious chronic or life-threatening disorders as cancer, birth defects, reproductive, neurological and respiratory disorders as well as psychiatric disorders like depression.

Therefore it is of utmost importance to ensure that pests are safely managed in our state's health care and elder care facilities

Maryland Pesticide Network (MPN), founded in 1994 is a coalition of 25 organizations in MD concerned about the impact of pesticides on public health and the environment. Our diverse coalition includes health care provider organizations including MNA and the MD chapters of the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Lung Association and Physicians for Social Responsibility as well as the MD PTA, labor, religious and environmental groups.

Our coalition publishes educational materials for the public and for health care providers on pesticides and public health. We also administer a project, the *Pesticides and the Chesapeake Bay watershed* project, comprised of 115 stakeholders concerned about the impact of pesticides on our watershed.

MPN was also instrumental in the passage of the 1998 integrated pest management in Schools law, which mandates that pesticides only be used in our public schools after all non-toxic options have been exhausted or are unreasonable.

Integrated Pest Management- IPM -is a strategy that focuses on long-term non-chemical pest-prevention based on such strategies as good housekeeping and maintenance. .. For example, doorsweeps – an important preventive tool in an IPM program- can actually reduce rodent's entry by 65%. Contrary to conventional pest control, in IPM we only use least hazardous pesticides as a last resort, to minimize patients, residents and employees' exposure to pesticides.

A 2003 national report--Healthy Hospitals: Controlling Pests Without Harmful Pesticides, published by Health Care Without Harm and the national organization Beyond Pesticides, also our partner on this project, indicated that hospital patients around the country were being unnecessarily exposed to a variety of toxic pesticides.

The results of this report brought together the MD IPM in Health Care facilities project partners- MPN and Beyond Pesticides- to assess whether the national findings reflected what is going on in MD health care facilities. Our survey of MD facilities closely reflected the findings of the national report and pointed to the need to educate MD health care facilities about IPM.

The project partners, in collaboration with MDH2E, consequently launched an IPM pilot project with seven forward thinking MD health and elder care facilities- later expanded to 13 facilities-- committed to greening their institutions. They are leaders in the industry, both in MD and nationally, who understand that safe pest management is an important aspect of protecting patient/resident and employee health and the environment