

Pesticides and You

News from the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides (NCAMP)

One in a Series of NCAMP "How-To's"

Detoxifying Public Housing, First Steps

Every year, more than 70 million pounds of pesticides are applied around homes and gardens. As housing officials struggle with the problems of pest control, the nearly 4 million residents of public and subsidized housing, a particularly vulnerable group, are being chronically exposed to hazardous chemicals at considerable public expense. In virtually all cases there are excellent non- or low- toxic alternatives which are less costly and more effective than conventional pesticides.

If you live in public or subsidized housing, you can take steps to convert your public housing authority (PHA) to a least toxic approach.

•••**Find out who is responsible** for pest control within your PHA. There may be a pest control office, or someone in charge of hiring a commercial applicator. Develop a comfortable

relationship with these people. Understanding their concerns is essential in implementing a successful program.

•••**Find out the details** of your PHA's pest management plan. 1) what pests are a problem; 2) what chemicals are being used; 3) the details of any contract with commercial applicators; 4) if an "integrated pest management plan (IPM)" is being used; and, 5) what the control program costs each year. NCAMP has developed a survey form for PHA's and will aid tenants in getting and interpreting this information.

•••**Learn about the toxicity** of the chemicals being used and explain the risks to others. NCAMP has materials on the toxicity of most commonly used household pesticides.

•••**Educate yourself** about IPM methods and collect materials on com-

mon pests and non-chemical methods of control. Your library is an excellent place to start.

•••**Advocate alternatives.** If those in charge have become reliant on chemical approaches, it may take time, patience, and considerable effort to convert them.

•••**Don't despair** if you meet resistance. People with IPM program experience can provide information and advice to your PHA's decision makers, and help sway your authority. Contact NCAMP for suggestions.

•••**Involve other residents.** A well-informed, well-organized group is a powerful and persuasive force for change.

Remember, a good IPM program is safer, more effective, and cheaper than the common chemical control methods currently in use. These are powerful arguments -- even to the most conservative of managers.