

Schools Give Pesticides a Failing Grade

By **Becky Crouse**

Every time you turn your head, another school has adopted an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and/or right-to-know policy. What's going on? Could it be that schools today are finally recognizing that children are not little adults and have much greater risk from pesticide exposure? Could it be that they finally see the need to cut pesticide use and protect their students, staff and the environment? Holy cow!

Now an ideal school pest management policy would include: 1) restricted spray (buffer) zones to address drift issues, 2) sign posting for indoor and outdoor pesticide applications, 3) prior written notification for pesticide use, 4) guidelines for when and where pesticides can – and can't — be applied, and 5) the requirement that the school adopt an IPM program. But ideals are hard to come by. Most policies don't include every component when they are first adopted, but most do improve with time and as the policy proves itself effective.

Honestly though, is this movement towards less-toxic pest management really that much of a miracle? The fact that these policies are lighter on the pocketbook and more effective than conventional pest management policies is obvious — just look at the number of new policies that have been adopted this school year alone! Here are some examples of recently adopted pest management policies from around the country. None of them are completely comprehensive, but they all contain a right-to-know provision — an invaluable tool for parents, an important first step for the communities involved and a positive step in the growing movement of school IPM.

Hopkins School District 270, Hopkins, MN

- Defines IPM as a pest control approach that emphasizes using a balanced combination of tactics to reduce pests to a tolerable level, while using pesticides and herbicides as a last resort;
- Defines what pesticides may be used and mandates that they can only be applied by certified applicators when the building will be clear of students for at least 48 hours;
- Provides notification of outdoor pesticide use with signs at the application site, and 48-hour pre-notification of indoor pesticide use via signs posted at the site; and,
- Requires that records of pesticides and herbicides used be kept for the purpose of public review.

Larkspur School District, Larkspur, CA

- Defines IPM, calling for the use of chemical controls as a last resort;
- Lists criteria for which pesticides are deemed unacceptable for the approved product list;
- Designates a staff person to coordinate the IPM program

and establish an IPM committee, consisting of the Superintendent, the District IPM Coordinator, one parent of enrolled student(s), and one community and/or organization representative (to provide guidance, education and advice regarding IPM policy and procedures);

- Requires annual written notification addressing expected use of pesticide products not on the approved use product list;
- Provides for a registry for any individuals who wish to receive notification of planned pesticide applications at the school site. Notification will occur at least 72 hours before the application, exempting approved use products; and,
- Requires posting of warning signs at the pesticide application site at least 72 hours before the application and until at least 72 hours after the application, exempting approved use products.

Five Town Community School District, Camden, ME

- Uses IPM procedures to determine when to control pests and with what methods, utilizing least-toxic pesticides only as a last resort;
- Requires that all staff and students be notified of upcoming pesticide applications through postings in designated areas at the school and notices sent home to parents;
- Mandates that pesticide use records be maintained on site; and,
- Requires anyone applying pesticides in schools to be licensed as a commercial applicator through the Board of Pesticide Control.

Beyond Pesticides can equip you with the organizing tools necessary to help your school district improve its pest management policy. Contact us for copies of our *Survey of Pest Management Practices at Schools and Daycare Facilities; Expelling Pesticides From Schools*, a comprehensive book of information about school IPM, or a model school pest management policy, or visit our website, www.beyondpesticides.org.

Integrated Pest Management

1. Eliminates or mitigates economic and health damage caused by pests;
2. Minimizes the use of pesticides and the associated risks to human health and the environment; and,
3. Uses integrated methods, site or pest inspections, monitoring of pest populations, an evaluation of the need for pest control, one or more non-chemical pest control methods and, if nontoxic options have been exhausted, least-toxic pesticides.