



Implementation of IPM and Pesticide Notification in Illinois Schools: Results from a Survey by Safer Pest Control Project

Pests are a common problem in many schools and pesticides linked to health problems are often utilized to eliminate them. Pesticide sprays also exacerbate asthma and are not always effective. Children are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of pesticides because of their smaller size, developing bodies and tendency to explore their environment. Pesticide applications can be minimized while controlling pests by using Integrated Pest Management.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), and the Illinois PTA endorse Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM is a pest control method that corrects the root cause of pest problems and uses pesticides as a last resort after other methods have been tried. As defined by IDPH, IPM "combines preventive techniques, non-chemical pest control methods, and the appropriate use of pesticides with preferences for products that are the least harmful to human health and the environment." IPM has proven successful in multiple settings—homes, schools, day care centers, public housing and large institutions.

The Illinois state legislature passed two bills in 1999 requiring safer pest control practices in public schools. The laws require:

- Schools practice IPM indoors
- Schools assign a staff person to be responsible for the IPM program
- Parents and staff be notified in writing two business days prior to indoor and outdoor pesticide applications. (*Baits and antimicrobial agents are exempt from the notification requirement.*)

To understand pest problems and pesticide use in schools, the Chicago-based non-profit Safer Pest Control Project (SPCP) conducted three surveys. The first survey, conducted in 1997, found that 78% of schools routinely sprayed pesticides while only 18% reported pest problems. Only 17% of schools had heard of IPM and 13% posted signs informing parents

and staff prior to pesticide applications. The survey's results along with the findings of a subsequent task force convened by SPCP on pesticides and children's health, led to the passage of Illinois' IPM and Notification Laws.

SPCP's second survey in summer 2000 gauged the IPM and notification laws' impact on Illinois schools. The survey found that almost every school district was aware of the new laws (96%) and intended to implement them (92%). Survey results also indicated widespread confusion among districts as to what IPM entailed. More than half of the districts planning an implementing IPM were still regularly spraying pesticides or could not identify the components of an IPM program.

Results from the third survey in the fall of 2001 found that efforts to implement the laws were high: 97% of schools reported they practice IPM and notify parents regarding pesticide applications. SPCP's analysis of responses documented that 73% of districts have an IPM program that does not include regular pesticide spraying and incorporates non-chemical methods of pest control. SPCP also reports that 86% of schools have an IPM policy, 90% have staff assigned to oversee IPM, and 76% have staff that has received IPM training. We found a significant increase from 22% to 91% in the use of IPM methods such as sanitation, traps, physical barriers and least-toxic pesticides first.

Unfortunately, 23% of schools still report spraying pesticides on a regular basis, either monthly (20%) or quarterly (3%). This is a significant decline from the 1997 survey, but indicates that an important aspect of IPM—the elimination of regularly scheduled pesticide applications—is not yet understood at a quarter of school districts. Respondents' reported their biggest challenges to implementing IPM and notification were the lack of information, resources and training (30%), staff cooperation (30%), and cost (23%). Complete results of the 2001 survey with comparisons to previous surveys are summarized on the next page.

School IPM and Notification Survey Results: 1997, 2000 and 2001*

QUESTION	2001 (115 schools)	2000 (102 schools)	1997 (106 schools)
Heard of IPM	--	--	17%
Practice IPM (according to respondent)	97%	92%	--
Practice IPM (according to analysis)	73%	41%	--
Notify parents before spray pesticide applications	97%	92%	13%
Notify parents by registry	61%	--	--
Notify all parents each time (Universal)	43%	--	--
Have an IPM Policy	86%	52%	--
Have a staff person responsible for the IPM program	90%	86%	--
This staff person has received IPM training	76%	--	--
Use pesticides	80%	--	82%
As needed	46%	--	25%
Regularly	23%	29%	78%
Monthly	20%	--	71%
Quarterly	3%	--	--
Pest control company apply pesticides	65%	--	94%
Custodial/maintenance staff apply pesticides	17%	--	14%
Keep written records of pesticide applications	63%	--	--
Use non-chemical methods	91%	22%	--
Sanitation	71%	--	--
Mechanical traps	68%	--	--
Physical barriers	67%	--	--
Least-toxic pesticides first	61%	34%	--
Physical removal	23%	--	--
Biological controls	12%	--	--
Biggest challenge in implementation (96 responses)	83%	--	--
Lack of information, training or resources	30%	--	--
Staff cooperation	26%	--	--
Cost	20%	--	--
Finding a pest control company to do IPM	11%	--	--
IPM has been ineffective	7%	--	--
More time and/or work required	5%	--	--

Methodology

Safer Pest Control Project (SPCP), a non-profit organization dedicated to reducing pesticide use and promoting safer alternatives in Illinois, conducted the surveys in October 2001, August 2000, and November/December 1997. The 2001 survey was conducted by mail with 115 school districts responding. The 2000 survey was conducted by phone with 102 respondents. The 1997 survey was conducted by phone and mail of 106 schools and districts responding. The respondent for each district was the employee identified as being responsible for IPM or pest control, primarily the superintendent or the head of maintenance. Complete results from the 1997 and 2000 surveys can be obtained from SPCP.

* *Comparisons between surveys are made where possible.*

Safer Pest Control Project (SPCP) is a non-profit organization working to reduce pesticide use and promote alternatives in Illinois.

SPCP • 25 E. Washington St., Suite 1515 • Chicago, Illinois 60602

Tel: 312/641-5575 • Fax: 312/641-5454 • spcp@iname.com • www.spcpweb.org