E&PP Info Note #719
09/08/03

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE

Why aren't ALL Tennessee schools using IPM?

Karen M. Vail, Ph.D, Associate Professor, Entomology and Plant Pathology, 2431 Center Drive, 205 Plant Science Bldg., University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996-4560, kvail@utk.edu, (865)974-7135, (865)974-8343 FAX

I often ask the questions,**"Why aren't all the school systems in Tennessee using integrated pest management (IPM)?"** or **"Why would a school system risk exposing a child to pesticides when it is unnecessary?"** Here are some of the responses I have received, or that have been implied, and my comments.

1. What's IPM?

IPM aims to reduce exposure to pests and pesticides and is a process that extends beyond pesticide applications to include reduction of food, water, harborage, and access used by pests. In an IPM program, pest populations are managed by pest-proofing and cleaning the building; pesticides are used only "as needed" according to an inspection or pest sighting; the least hazardous pesticide effective for control of targeted pests is selected; and pesticides are targeted to areas not contacted by or accessible to children or staff. More detail on the school IPM program can be found in the UT Agricultural Extension Service PB1603, *Suggested Guidelines for Managing Pests: Adopting Integrated Pest Management* or our web site, (http://eppserver.ag.utk.edu/sch_ipm.htm), which links to other school IPM programs in the nation.

OK, there's a problem with awareness. Even though we've used many venues to increase school IPM awareness, the word has not reached everyone. In 1996, The Tennessee Department of Agriculture asked UT Ag. Extension Service to lead a school IPM program for the state. In that year, a letter was written to all school superintendents and county agents explaining IPM in schools. School IPM information was incorporated into the pesticide applicator training for Category 7: Industrial, institutional, structural and health-related pest control. Presentations, including a school IPM quiz bowl held at the Tennessee Pest Control Association Annual Conference, were provided to pest management professionals in five locations. In 1997, a manual, PB1603, was developed, approved by the Tennessee Pest Control Board, printed and distributed to all public and private primary and secondary schools in the state. School districts were surveyed to determine baseline pest management practices. Since then many venues, such as meetings with school superintendents, plant managers, parent teachers associations (PTAs), environmental educators, pest management professionals, pest management professionals with school accounts; consultations with schools with chemically-sensitive students; formation of a school advisory board; demonstrations and visitations; and newspaper and radio releases have been made to promote voluntary adoption of IPM in schools. A more complete list of activities can be found at (http://cipm.ncsu.edu/symposium/viewposters.cfm under poster F5-P). A 2002

school pest management survey revealed that about 25% of responding school systems are currently using IPM. This is more than double the school systems using IPM in 1997, but still a long way from 100% adoption.

2. The superintendent or pest management decision-maker is familiar with IPM, but the school is still applying pesticides to baseboards on a monthly basis regardless of need.

The information has not trickled down to the school purchasing officer. Many resources are available on the web including model bid specifications (http://eppserver.ag.utk.edu/sch_ipm.htm, http://schoolipm.ifas.ufl.edu/doc/model_contract.htm, http://www.ipminstitute.org/school_biblio.htm#Starting).

In addition, we have recognized the need for training the purchasing officers. Members of the UT YEAH (Youth, Environment and Health, http://utyeah.utk.edu) Research Team are partnering with the Tennessee Department of Education, Department of Agriculture and others to attempt to obtain training funds through the US EPA and the USDA regional grants program.

3. Why do we need IPM when our system is working just fine?!

How do you know your system is working fine? Is a logbook kept of complaints, services, and pest management evaluations?

Are children missing class due to asthma? Cockroaches, their feces and cast skins have been documented to cause asthma attacks.

Are children missing class due to pesticide exposure? Several school systems in Tennessee have adopted IPM because a child was having difficulty working in schools where pesticides were sprayed. After IPM adoption, these previously home-bound children were able to return to school. Do you know when a chemically-sensitive child will attend your school?

If your school is using IPM, aren't you less likely to have a pesticide poisoning and therefore more likely to reduce the school's liability?

4. I'm sure switching to IPM will cost more!

Well, we have comments from a large, urban TN school system that claims they have saved large sums of money after switching to IPM and comments from a small, rural school district that sees no difference in cost (UT E&PP Info Note#720, A Monroe County,TN School IPM Success Story, http://eppserver.ag.utk.edu/sch_ipm.htm) The costs for each school will differ according to the pest abundance and the maintenance/repairs needed at each school. Schools requiring significant pest-proofing may see an initial increase in cost. Nationwide, case studies on the cost and success of IPM can be found at http://www.beyondpesticides.org/main.html and http://www.ipminstitute.org/school_biblio.htm#Success.

E12-4615-00-001-04