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Reducing Pesticide Exposures in Educational Institutions

Pesticides are often applied at schools to help maintain sanitary conditions and suppress rodent and insect populations; however, their use exposes workers, staff, and students to potentially harmful chemicals. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a pest-control alternative to routine pesticide use in schools. IPM emphasizes several elements to successfully manage and suppress pests from an environment without relying on the regular use of chemicals. To implement IPM at a school, administrators must start by developing a written policy and procedural guidelines for school pest management and incorporate the following suggested eight IPM steps:

1. Appoint a pest manager—The pest manager, such as a member of the custodial staff or a company contracted to perform pest management at the school, should be knowledgeable and competent to carry out pest management duties.
2. Monitor for pest problems—The pest manager should routinely inspect the building, including entrances, food/water storage sites, and restrooms for pest activity. The pest manager should respond to any pest complaints reported by students, staff, parents, and others.
3. Identify the nature of any pest problems—The pest manager should find the origin of a pest problem (e.g., food crumbs, cracks in walls, etc.) and identify the type of pest.
4. Eliminate the source(s) of the problem without using pesticides—The pest manager should modify the habitat by using habitat modification (i.e., nontoxic methods), such as repairing cracks and crevices, sealing doors, moving trash receptacles away from the building, and ensuring sanitary conditions.
5. If nontoxic methods fail or are impractical, pesticide use should follow certain principles — These include: use the least toxic pesticide that is effective and utilize approved application techniques that minimize exposure (try to avoid using pesticides that have labels with the following words, “Warning” or “Danger”). Use only trained and qualified workers to handle and apply pesticides. Read and follow the directions on the pesticide container. Ensure the pesticide applicator uses the appropriate personal protective equipment.
6. Keep accurate records to document and evaluate the effectiveness of the IPM program —Record the types of pests detected before and after any habitat modification or pesticide treatment. Document measures taken to control the pest(s).
7. Educate the school community about pesticides and IPM—Involve and educate stakeholders, including administration, instructional and support staff, parents, and students. Distribute the school’s pest-control management policy to school stakeholders periodically; for example, by including it in parent handbooks and teacher’s

manuals. Educate students and teachers on how their behavior contributes to pest problems (food in classrooms/cubbies, gum under desks, paper clutter, etc.). Involve students and staff in pest monitoring activities. A school employee should always be present to watch over all IPM service provider visits.

8. Notify and provide reentry recommendations when pesticides are used—Consider providing written notification of any upcoming pesticide application to all students, parents, and staff. At least 19 states have laws that require schools to provide some type of written notification before a pesticide application. Many of these states require that notification be made at least 24 hours before an application. Specify the type of pesticide to be used, if possible. The pest manager should be available to provide more

specific information on the pesticide. Post notices around the perimeter of the application area and leave these notices in place for 48 hours after the application. Avoid spraying pesticides when children and staff are present. Pesticides shouldn't be sprayed during school hours or when school activities are taking place. Applications on Friday evenings are ideal if no weekend school activities are scheduled. Restrict staff and students' access to the treated area until the pesticide has dried or as long as is recommended on the pesticide label. Baits or other types of gels and pastes in areas inaccessible to staff and students may be exempt from these notification guidelines.

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