

Green Municipal Government Project

A Project of MASSPIRG and Toxics Action Center

Integrated Pest Management and Municipalities

Municipalities have recently begun to adopt integrated pest management (IPM) policies to protect the health and safety of the public. A municipal-wide IPM policy protects individuals against harmful chemicals and promotes the adoption of IPM in individual homes and businesses by broadening public awareness of the hazards of pesticide use.

What's Wrong with Traditional Pest Control?

Traditional pest control relies almost exclusively on chemicals, which are toxic to living organisms. For instance, if you apply a pesticide with the intent to kill ants, residues may inadvertently harm family, pets, or beneficial insects. Further, pesticides can cause both short and long-term health effects and *are never "safe," " even when applied according to label directions.* Widely used pesticides have been linked to cancer, neurotoxicity, hormone disruption, immune problems, and reproductive toxicity.

What is IPM?

IPM is a comprehensive strategy used to achieve desired pest control in an environmentally responsible manner. In contrast to traditional pest control programs, which rely heavily on chemicals, IPM favors the use of ecological means that address the conditions, which support pests. Common IPM techniques include: monitoring to determine immediate and ongoing need for pest control, improved sanitation, physical barriers, traps, and natural pest predators. When pesticides are necessary, the lowest-risk chemicals possible are used. By using *common sense first and pesticides last,* *you* can protect your family's health and often eliminate pest problems altogether.

Who Offers IPM Services?

A growing number of pest control companies offer IPM services. Once begun, either the professional, the owner/occupant, or trained staff can monitor the program. Ask any pest

control company you contact whether their applicators are trained in IPM. Make them be specific since some companies claim they do IPM but really rely on chemicals.

Municipalities, individuals, and businesses may also implement safer IPM policies both in and outdoors. There is a wide variety of information available on how to use IPM successfully. Check your local library or bookstore, or call the UMass Extension School or the state Department of Food and Agriculture for more specific information or recommendations.

IPM Can Be Used Anywhere

The city of Newton has successfully adopted a city-wide IPM program. Newton is the first city in Massachusetts to adopt safe and effective IPM policies for all city-owned buildings, parks, and roads. IPM has also been successfully adopted into many school systems, including those in Newton, MA; Lexington, MA; Eugene, OR; Gwinnett County, GA; Cape May County, NJ; Montgomery County, MD; and Berkeley, CA.

Does It Cost More?

Start-up costs for an IPM program tend to be higher than a single application of toxic pesticide, but IPM is a long-term solution. Most case studies have found that IPM results in cost savings, often quite substantial, after the first year. Further, many places experience better pest control.

Does IPM Really Work?

In most cases, IPM is at least as effective as traditional pest control methods. An IPM response is tailored to the pest's biology and habits and the affected site's characteristics, allowing people to find long-term solutions to pest problems rather than spot fixes. At the same time, reduced pesticide use decreases the risk of human exposure, pests developing resistance, or beneficial populations being disturbed.