

CASE STUDY

Integrated pest management gets ahead of the pest problem

As Bill Ritchie, Director of Milton's Consolidated Facilities Department says, "You can't eliminate all pests – IPM is about controlling the environment as best you can." This is precisely the goal of IPM (integrated pest management), and the schools of Milton have been particularly successful in their comprehensive strategy of managing pests because they've engaged their staff and created effective communication processes in support of IPM.

In a suburb of Boston, Milton Public Schools is made up of about 4,000 students and six schools. Their experience in implementing integrated pest management is not unique and their challenges and successes are applicable to any school or district across the Commonwealth. IPM is a team effort, requiring ongoing communication and use of effective practices and processes. Before MA regulations required the use of IPM in schools in 2000, pest management in Milton schools, like many school districts, employed the use of traditional pesticides to manage pest problems.

Bill Ritchie embraces the safer approach of IPM, which is based on regular indoor and outdoor assessments and well-trained staff and systems that are responsive to emerging problems. In Milton, facilities and custodial staff conduct assessments on a monthly or more frequent basis, depending on the season and pest needs. These assessments aim to identify signs of pests or problems that foster pests, and to make sure baits or traps are appropriately placed. This information is summarized on the school's IPM plan which must be registered annually with the state. In addition, at least once a quarter, facilities staff do a structural IPM assessment, looking for building and facilities problems like holes around pipes or doors that don't properly close or have gaps that allow pests to enter.

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environment as best you can.”

-- Bill Ritchie,
Director of Milton's Consolidated Facilities

Having an effective communication process in place allows for quick and effective responses to pest problems. For example, Milton school staff report pest sightings or potential problems to their custodians, who are trained to assess conditions and place traps based on pest behaviors. After assessing the situation, custodians log the findings and resulting pest control measures in a centrally-located log book. In other school districts, the staff are encouraged to use the log themselves to document pest problems in their classroom or area of the building. The pest log is a requirement of the MA IPM law and enables the designated pest management coordinator to monitor problems, pest control strategies, and treatments. The IPM law also requires that the district send a letter to all families and to staff informing them of their school's individual IPM plan or for notification of an emergency waiver of the IPM plan. This waiver allows for the use of an approved pesticide treatment for a pest problem deemed a potential health threat (for example, stinging wasps or bees).

As Milton has found, coordinated efforts across all staff roles is critical to ensure that everyone is doing what they can to minimize pests. For example, classroom organization and design are important for effectively managing and storing classroom materials that could be homes for pests. Proper storage of

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food is important so it isn't left out to attract pests. Food service staff can take simple measures such as breaking down and disposing of shipping boxes immediately to prevent pests from finding a new home. And in the case of a new construction or renovations, decisions about the placement of dumpsters or landscaping decisions such as keeping plantings away from the foundations can have a positive impact on IPM.

Like Milton, many municipalities across the Commonwealth are consolidating facilities management to include all schools and municipal buildings and facilities. Unlike the schools, municipal buildings are not required by law to follow IPM. However, town-wide implementation of IPM strategies is a good public health model and allows for the sharing of data and resources. Whether a school or district sits in a rural or urban setting, or somewhere in between, a properly trained facilities staff bolstered by good communication and processes can help to ensure that IPM keeps potential pest problems in check and reduces asthma triggers.

Related resources

Massachusetts Facilities Administrators Association

<http://www.massfacilities.org/>: Ongoing training, online community with membership.

School IPM Program, Children's and Families Protection Act, Massachusetts Natural Resources Collaborations

<http://massnrc.org/ipm/index.html>: Multiple resources and tools for pest management professionals, schools and daycare, and parents; including individual school IPM plans.

FAC92: How to Use the Integrated Pest Management Statewide Contract

<https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/06/08/FAC92.pdf>: Summary of state contract, including benefits and cost savings, and a list of vendors and contact information.