

## **Patricia D. Hastings**

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**Subject:** Press Release on School IPM in Pittsburgh

*Posting from the Penn State IPM listserv of September 17, 2003 courtesy of Ed Rajotte, Professor of Entomology and IPM Coordinator for Penn State University*

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September 16, 2003

### **Pittsburgh School District Makes the Grade with IPM**

UNIVERSITY PARK, PA -- With 36,000 students spread out over almost one hundred buildings, managing pests in and around those buildings could easily be an overwhelming challenge. The Pittsburgh School District's pest management program has shown a great deal of success, however, with a little help from IPM.

IPM, or integrated pest management, relies heavily on prevention, sanitation, maintenance, and monitoring to reduce the reliance on pesticides, says Ed Rajotte, professor of entomology at Penn State University and Pennsylvania IPM Program Coordinator. "Control strategies in an IPM plan include structural and procedural modifications that reduce the food, water, harborage, and access used by pests. Pesticides are used on an as-needed basis as determined by monitoring. When a pesticide is needed, it is applied in an enclosed trap or on a spot treatment basis whenever possible and targeted to the specific pest," Rajotte explains.

Legislation passed last year requires all Pennsylvania public schools to provide notification to parents, students and teachers in advance of pesticide applications and requires schools to adopt an IPM plan to manage their pest problems both in and out of the classroom. In addition, the least toxic, shortest duration effective material is used. Pesticides are not applied when students, teachers or staff are present in the affected area to assure the safety of the school-learning environment. The Pittsburgh School District has had such a plan in place for the last five years, and can attest that it works.

Maria Moio, pest control operator and IPM coordinator for the Pittsburgh School District, initially had reservations about starting an IPM program in an urban setting. "I thought we would have a lot of obstacles to overcome, and ultimately it wouldn't work," she says. While she admits it is costly to get an IPM program off the ground, she feels it's well worth it in the long-term. "We've found the savings to be tremendous, we're more than getting our initial investment out of the program. I also like the fact that we've been able to reduce our pesticide use, which is better for everyone involved," Moio explains.

Moio has been a licensed pest control operator for over ten years and was introduced to IPM through a Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture training program. She became the pest control operator for the school district in 1989. "When I first started, pest control operators Richard Bopp and Mike Devine removed 360 rats out of a high school building over the course of six months," says Moio. She spent the next two years knocking back pests and trying to gain some control before implementing IPM tactics, which enabled her to start using fewer pesticides.

Moio worked with the advocacy group Clean Water Action and used information from the Pennsylvania IPM Program to develop the school district's current IPM policy. "Once we had the policy in place, we could begin training the staff in individual school buildings on IPM." Custodial staff, electricians and others in the individual buildings are trained to implement IPM tactics while doing their jobs.

Currently, Moio only sprays pesticides on school grounds when stinging insects are present due to health concerns. "We emphasize using pest baits, trapping, and prevention methods such as sanitation and cleaning," Moio explains. In the ninety-six buildings she oversees, Moio says she rarely needs to use pesticides. She says her ultimate goal is to be like the Maytag man, always available but usually not needed. "I'd prefer not to spray, and with the new legislation, we now have to give seventy-two hour notification. I'd rather avoid all that and rely on IPM."

Moio says there are problem buildings in her district, and those are usually the ones where faculty allow food in the classrooms. She says that her biggest challenge is getting people to cooperate and changing the way they think.

Things are changing, however. Now that IPM in schools is law, administrators, faculty and staff at schools are required to listen, and Moio has responded with education sessions for those working and attending school in the district. "Currently, we're providing education sessions at ten schools. We provide an overview of what IPM is and why it's important for faculty and staff, and teach students about good and bad insects," Moio explains.

Moio credits a lot of her success with having the support of her supervisor Jay Boyd, director of plant operations for the school district. Boyd supports Moio's efforts because he sees the benefits a well-implemented IPM program. "We've had about a ninety-nine percent decrease in pest problems due to Moio's efforts," he says. "Education is really key, for the administrators, teachers and students. They all must play a part of an IPM program or it will fail," Boyd insists.

Boyd and Moio have also assisted other schools districts with their IPM programs. School administrators and others who have questions about the Pittsburgh School District's program can email Moio at [mmoio1@phgboe.net](mailto:mmoio1@phgboe.net), or phone (412) 488-4275.

The Pennsylvania IPM (PA IPM) program is a collaboration between Penn State and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture aimed at promoting IPM in both agricultural and nonagricultural situations. The PA IPM program's Web site at <http://paipm.cas.psu.edu> contains a wealth of information and resources for schools adopting IPM programs. By clicking on the "Schools" link, visitors also can download "IPM for Pennsylvania Schools, A How-To Manual." The link also leads to information about the school IPM effort in Pennsylvania and to educational materials from across the country. In addition, the site offers an interactive database to assist teachers with IPM background information, lesson plans and support materials from throughout the United States.

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