

Expelling Pesticides from School

A How-to Guide to Reducing Children's Exposure to Pesticides

A Beyond Pesticides Fact Sheet



Changing a school's pest management policy requires perseverance. Since pest control is not often a large part of the school's budget, many administrators will not consider it a focus and are likely to be uninformed about their school's policy and any available alternatives.

Ask your school to stop using pesticides and adopt alternative practices that have been adopted in other schools. A strong, comprehensive integrated pest management (IPM) program can eliminate the unnecessary application of synthetic, volatile pesticides in schools. While the alternatives are being put into place, ask the school to provide you with prior notice when pesticides are to be used.

Beyond Pesticides can provide you with the resources necessary for developing, adopting and implementing a safer school pest management policy. Following is a general outline of the process to follow.

Educate Yourself

(Contact Beyond Pesticides for the *Expelling Pesticides from Schools: Adopting School Pest Management* information packet.)

- ❑ Gather information on the hazards of pesticide exposure and the increased susceptibility of children to the health effects of pesticides.
- ❑ Identify any applicable local, state and federal laws concerning school pesticide use.
- ❑ Identify any pesticide-related incidents that may have occurred at the school. Consider the ethnic or socio-economic demographics that may highlight environmental justice issues.
- ❑ Learn about integrated pest management (IPM) and know what alternatives to chemical pest control methods are available.
- ❑ Collect examples of successful school IPM programs from around the country.

Identify the School's Pest Management/Pesticide Policy

(Contact Beyond Pesticides for an evaluation survey.)

- ❑ Find out who administers the pest control program — the school, the school system or a contractor.
- ❑ Send an evaluation survey to or call the appropriate school personnel to find out, in a *friendly way*, what pest management controls your school is using, the application and

reentry policies, the pesticide application schedule, the pesticides used, and the cost of the current pest management program.

- ❑ Make follow-up calls to ensure that the survey is completed and, when returned, check for clarity and completeness. Call the site personnel if you have any questions.
- ❑ Analyze the data. A good pest management program will be based on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) which requires a decision-making process, not just the use of certain tools along with a regular spraying schedule. IPM is a way of trying to prevent pest problems, understanding why certain problems occur and choosing the most appropriate, least-toxic resolution.

Develop a Strategic Plan

(Beyond Pesticides can provide contact information for community and statewide organizations to work with, as well as fact sheets, brochures and reports.)

- ❑ Identify and contact friends and neighbors, individuals and organizations who would care about or be impacted by school pesticide use including parents, students, teachers, school personnel, unions, doctors, environmentalists, local PTA, outdoor clubs, and religious institutions.
- ❑ Consider having an advisory committee, one person cannot do all the work alone.
- ❑ Set up an organizing and planning meeting with local citizens and organizations, in either a public facility or someone's home.
- ❑ Formulate a position. Try a positive approach first, advocating alternatives. You can move on to more adversarial positions later, like: "Stop the pesticide use."
- ❑ Develop and present a proposed IPM / right-to-know policy for adoption by the school district. Insist on full disclosure and a public hearing about existing or proposed pesticide use.
- ❑ Create necessary fact sheets and brochures for distribution to the public and media.
- ❑ Create a report of site evaluation results, speaking as a constructive problem-solver and concerned citizen. Speak strongly, but avoid blame and confrontation. Focus on the facts — these are the current practices in schools and these are the recommended improvements.
- ❑ Gather local media contact information and work closely with them to help them understand and develop the issue. Focus media on victims of the school pesticide use, then offer alternatives. Unfortunately, it is often only through victims' stories that we can convince policy makers of the need for new, least-toxic approaches.

Work with school decision-makers

- ❑ Contact appropriate school official(s) and ask for public endorsement of your proposal or participation in a press conference. Let them know why their support would be valuable, important and appropriate.
- ❑ Approach the official in a non-confrontational manner -- you want to work with, not against, them to change what is being done in your school. Ask the official to identify who is responsible for completing the evaluation survey for the chosen site and to

personally mail the appropriate person the survey with a letter requesting their participation. Call upon the official to follow-up on the letter sent.

- If the official refuses participation, consider exerting community pressure through phone calls and letters or asking another official of different standing for support or work.

Organize the Community

(Contact Beyond Pesticides for an organizing toolkit.)

- PTA meetings are an excellent forum to arouse interest and encourage parents, teachers and students to develop a pilot IPM project in their school.
- Petition your local principal, school administrator, and school board to implement an IPM program and to notify you prior to the use of pesticides.
- Distribute a flyer to publicize the issue and request specific action.
- Place articles and letters in appropriate newspapers and newsletters.
- Have a letter-writing campaign; provide sample letters that clearly state what is being requested from whom and why.
- Publicize and hold a community meetings to discuss the issue and gather support.
- Organizing public protests.
- Hold a press conference in front of the school or responsible agency.
- Create a district-wide workshop for pest managers, discussing alternative methods.

Celebrate Victories

- Develop media that coincides with the formal adoption of the school's policy.
- Acknowledge all who supported the campaign's efforts.
- Forward the new policy to Beyond Pesticides so it can be added to the list of communities that have adopted such policies and be distributed to activists across the country.

Become a Watchdog

- Make sure the school district is on track to improve their practices. The same individuals and organizations that were instrumental in getting the school to adopt the policy must also watchdog the school to make sure it is successfully implemented.
- Perhaps give an award if they improve a certain amount or reach a certain level, so they will be motivated to meet goals and improve their programs.