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PILOT SCHOOL PROGRAM IN IOWA: APPROACH AND ASSESSMENT

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A potential conflict arises in the methods a school uses to keep pests under control and protect the children and staff that are present in the facilities. All too often, pesticides are selected as the pest control method, with the primary focus on eliminating the pest in a quick and inexpensive manner. In an effort to reverse this trend and improve the safety for those using school facilities, a pilot program for integrated pest management in the school environment was conducted in Iowa from March 2001 through June 2002. The approach used included surveying school districts to determine pest control practices, convening an advisory group comprised of state agencies and pest control industry representatives, and in-depth training and technical assistance to the four selected public school districts. Assistance to the schools was comprised of an IPM overview workshop, pesticide safety and pest-specific workshops, resources for implementing IPM, development of a school IPM Web site, a landscape IPM overview workshop, facility audits with emphases on structural repairs needed and conditions conducive for pests, an inventory of disinfectants and other pesticide products in the schools, and technical assistance as requested. Initial assessment involved the comparison of responses to a test taken before and after IPM training, and responses of a survey instrument taken after completion of training. Although exam scores were higher following training (mean pre-training score 54% vs. post-training score 72%), the distinction was not significant due to a small sample size. Exit evaluations displayed an overall satisfaction with the training efforts and knowledge gained, and indicated willingness to change behavior based on training. Eliminating clutter, reading disinfectant and pesticide labels before use, storing food in pest-proof containers, identifying pests before controlling them, and reducing pesticide use at work and home were IPM practices respondents were willing to do following training. Final assessments determining what IPM practices had been implemented in the schools will be done May 2003.