



Ten Steps to a Healthy School

A single individual can begin a campaign to adopt a least-toxic pest management policy in his or her school district. There is no one formula for reducing pesticide use at schools, but many lessons have been learned through the efforts of parents and others in school districts across the country. Here are ten steps that have been useful in many communities:

- 1. Research the problem**—The first step towards a healthy school comes from understanding the pesticide problem your school district confronts. An ability to explain that problem gives you a powerful tool for demanding change. Research should establish what pesticides are being used and their health effects, what pest problems the school faces, whether your school district has a pesticide policy, and how pest management decisions are made. The best place to start is with the Building and Grounds Department or the Office of the Superintendent.
- 2. Build support**—After completing your research, develop a core group of people to launch your campaign. A group, as opposed to an individual, is unquestionably more effective in being heard and meeting goals. Several strategies are useful to find members for your initial group. Talk to neighbors or parents and teachers within your school or school district. Contact local groups with possible interest, such as the PTA or local community and environmental organizations. Brainstorm to ascertain all community constituents that might be concerned about the issue and determine how best to get them involved.
- 3. Establish your platform**—You and the other community members you enlist should determine exactly what you want the school district to do. Clearly defining the steps that you want the district to take helps organize your campaign and assure that the district passes a strong pesticide policy. Consider the following positions when developing your platform: 1) Ban use of the most hazardous pesticides; 2) Establish least-toxic Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as official school district policy; 3) Provide universal notification of pesticide use; and 4) Establish a pest management committee consisting of parents, teachers, school staff, and public health organizations to oversee policy implementation.
- 4. Approach school district staff to support your platform**—After determining your platform, meet with school maintenance staff and other staff responsible for pest management to determine their position on your request. The more that they feel part of the policy design process, the better the chance of program success. Be prepared to talk about successful alternative solutions in other school districts. Be sure to bring to the meeting people who represent the impacted community, including teachers, parents, and students.
- 5. 'Power map' the school board**—In order to pass a policy, you must convince the majority of school board members that a least-toxic IPM policy is the right approach to pest control. Determine how best to influence them by ascertaining who has the ultimate power of decision, the politics of the board and which members are likely to support or oppose you, which individuals or institutions are likely to influence your targets, and which targets and influences you have access to. Finally, over whom does your group have influence? Remember that your allies on the school board are often the most effective messengers.
- 6. Develop and implement a strategic plan of action**—Once you know your goals, develop a strategic campaign. Base your plan on your discoveries about the school board. Having learned what influences its decisions, select appropriate strategies, such as recruitment of board members, media coverage, grassroots pressure, lobbying, and coalition building.
- 7. Present your proposal to the school board for formal adoption**—A least-toxic IPM policy has its greatest impact when formally adopted and institutionalized by the district school board. Usually a board sub-committee will review and approve the policy before it goes to the full board. As you prepare to present your proposal at school sub-committee and board meetings, line up your votes, ready your speakers, recruit supporters to pack the room, and prepare for opposition.
- 8. Form a pest management committee**—The most successful IPM programs enlist diverse constituents. The committee responsible for overseeing implementation of the least-toxic IPM policy should

include parents, teachers, students, maintenance workers, environmental and public health organizations, and school staff. Generally, the pest management committee must meet frequently in the initial stages of establishing the program and less often as the policy is properly implemented.

9. Publicize the results—Use media to inform people about your efforts throughout your campaign. If you succeed, a wide audience witnesses your victory. If your plan is rejected, that same audience witnesses the school board's refusal to protect children's health. Either way, strategic use of media educates and influences your targets.

10. Watchdog policy implementation—A least-toxic IPM policy is only effective if implemented and

maintained. Ongoing vigilance is essential in order to avoid falling into old habits of pesticide dependence. Track and attend important meetings, work to develop a strong pest management committee, and develop good relations with the offices of the Superintendent and Grounds and Maintenance to ensure ready access to information. Long-term success also comes from nurturing continued support from parents, teachers, and staff.

For more information and assistance on how to pass a good least-toxic IPM policy, contact the Washington Toxics Coalition at (206) 632-1545 or info@watoxics.org. *Reducing Pesticide Use in Schools*, Pesticide Watch's school organizing manual, is another rich source for learning more about passing an effective least-toxic pest control policy in your district. It is available at www.pesticidewatch.org.

For more information on school pest control that protects children's health, contact the Washington Toxics Coalition at (206) 632-1545 or info@watoxics.org