

Eco-friendly pest control? Believe it!

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DeVries

By Denise DeVries
Director of Business Development
Griffin Pest Solutions

When you think about pest control, the first thing that probably comes to mind is the use of pesticides. What you may not know is many pest control companies use a philosophy called Integrated Pest Management (IPM). IPM is an effective and environmentally sensitive approach that relies on a combination of common-sense practices. IPM programs employ current, comprehensive information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment. This information, in combination with available pest control methods, is used to manage pests with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment.

Understanding pest needs is essential to implementing IPM effectively. Pests seek habitats that provide the basics including air, moisture, food and shelter. Pest populations can be prevented or controlled by creating inhospitable environments, by removing some of the basic elements they need to survive, or by simply blocking their building access. Pests may also be managed by other methods such as monitoring devices, traps, vacuums, or pesticides, which are used as a last resort.

An efficient IPM program can be integrated with an existing pest management plan. Activities such as preventative maintenance, janitorial practices, landscaping, occupant education, and staff training are all part of an IPM program. The following steps are required to develop an IPM decision network:

1. Develop an official IPM policy statement.
2. Designate pest management roles for customers, pest management personnel, and key decision makers.
3. Set pest management objectives for the site(s).
4. Inspect site(s), identify, and monitor pest populations for potential problems.
5. Set action thresholds.
6. Apply IPM strategies to control pests.
7. Evaluate results to determine if pest management objectives are reached, and keep written records

Since 1992, the Michigan Department of Agriculture has required schools, public buildings and healthcare facilities to implement IPM programs in their facilities. If you are unsure if your building has an IPM program, ask your facility manager to see the log book. It's required by law and identifies the pest control company servicing the facility, records pest sightings and provides a detailed list of when, where and what type of pesticide was applied. In addition, pest control operators are required to have their IPM program approved by the State of Michigan. More information can be found on the consumer information section of the Michigan Department of Agriculture website.

IPM also plays a role in LEED for Existing Buildings Operations and Maintenance (LEED-EB O+M), with the potential to earn at least two points; one point for Credit 3 Integrated Pest Management, Erosion Control and Landscape management Plan and one for Credit 3.6 Green Cleaning – Indoor Integrated Pest Management.

IPM standards for LEED are significantly more complex than a standard IPM program. LEED standards call

for the use of IPM along with the least toxic pesticides only after all other options are exhausted. Should pesticides other than the least toxic be required, building occupants must be notified of pesticide applications at least 72 hours in advance. For emergency pesticide applications, building occupants may be notified 24 hours afterward. Whenever possible, the application should occur when the building has the fewest occupants.

Accurate record keeping is essential to earn LEED points associated with pest management. Pest control companies now have the ability to utilize hand-held scanners and barcode pest management devices. The scanners allow for time and date stamp services, provide detailed information on device locations, pest sightings and services required for each device. This information can then be utilized to create trend analysis and help pest management professionals work to solve issues without the use of pesticides.

Finally, if you are pursuing LEED-EB certification or searching for a pest management company well versed in IPM and green practices, look for one with GreenPro or Green Shield certifications and/or a LEED Green Associate on staff. These national certifications will differentiate those who understand the needs and requirements of LEED from companies with only a basic IPM knowledge. It may make the difference in your building's LEED certification level.

The U.S. Green Building Council is a coalition of leaders from across the building industry working to promote environmentally responsible, profitable and healthy places to live and work. The West Michigan Chapter provides and develops leadership through affiliations and education at all levels. Please send comments and column proposals to chuck.otto1@gmail.com.

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