

Assessment and Implementation of IPM in Schools: Practical Implementation

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When reviewing the literature regarding the implementation of public programs, it becomes apparent that three questions must be asked and answered to successfully implement a program such as IPM: 1) What action must be taken?; 2) who will take the necessary action?; and 3) do those that are taking action have the resources to complete their mission (Starling, 1998)?

What action must be taken? The “action” needed to practically implement integrated pest management (IPM) program in the school environment is to diffuse the incorporation of activities of the school community that prevent and/or address pest infestations in the most effective way possible – in partnership with an objective pest management professional. These activities include school sanitation (cultural control), maintenance (cultural and mechanical control) and security (identification of invading or infesting pests – monitoring). Under documented circumstances, these activities can be integrated with chemical control conducted by a qualified professional which includes a critical school activity – procurement. In other words, school communities must be allowed to believe they can successfully implement IPM by “*doing what they are doing now – just think pests*”.

While many school communities have been made aware of the IPM innovation from information offered by change agents (through conferences, trade journals, the internet, etc.), few have verifiable and/or sustainable programs. This lack of adoption is more a result of failed implementation rather than unavailable pest management technologies or inadequate funding or concern for school occupant health by school officials. Failed implementation is often the result of the change agents not taking the adopting communities through the “innovation-decision” process to diffuse the IPM innovation. Thus, the “action”, more specifically becomes implementing IPM by managing the process of adoption. “*IPM is a process not a miracle*”, it requires nurturing and confirmation to be diffused by the school community. If the IPM innovation has a relative advantage over an existing practice, is compatible with the community’s norms, values and beliefs, can be tried and observed then it can be sustained by the adopting community. In other words, “*pest management is people management*”.

Who will take the necessary action? In short, change agents. Historically, IPM change agents have been from University Extension (USDA) programs and/or State Lead Agencies for FIFRA (USEPA). Practically, Extension is minimally involved in school IPM (14% of states) and State Lead Agencies are taking more of a role. However, Not-for-profit organizations (IPM Institute of NA, NEHA, Beyond Pesticides) currently are recognized change agents and recently state health agencies are becoming increasingly involved (Center for Disease Control).

Do those that are taking action have the resources to complete their mission? Do those responsible for ensuring protection of the school from the risks of pests and pesticides provide job security and resources for implementers of IPM who attempt to change their community’s behavior? There are no funded mandates for the implementation of school IPM in the US. Therefore, support for the IPM in Schools “initiative” is unfunded or underfunded. Three federal agencies are currently providing funding for the implementation (versus research) of IPM in schools – USEPA, USDA and HHS.

Practical implementation of IPM in schools by change agents requires they must:

1. Demonstrate to the school community, the public and policy makers with a successful model that IPM has undeniable positive attributes and can easily overcome the pain of change.
2. Transfer it – make sense beyond the schools. The philosophy of IPM as practiced by most implementers (sometimes including me) has been too narrowly focused in the context of folks that work for our schools and entomology. The political base for IPM could be expanded by promoting IPM education to the public specific to school and home pest management, but with regard to a general awareness of public health and environmental concerns which could be adopted by all pesticide users (municipalities, our workplace, community centers, elderly and childcare, etc.).
3. **Market it – creating partnerships.** Management of public programs increasingly goes beyond mandates to marketing. Those responsible for policy decisions (children’s health advocates, government regulators, school officials, professional pest managers, etc.), program development and program implementation concerning pesticide use and pest management would do well to consider not only the importance of communication as a management skill, but also to employ the sub-specialty of diffusion into their strategic plans. Work with school business officials and the pest control industry to develop a “demand-side” (versus “supply-side) business model that is verifiable, sustainable and profitable.

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