

# Green Clean Schools



Healthy Cleaning for Students, Staff and the Environment

## Integrated Pest Management

[GreenCleanSchools.org](https://www.GreencleanSchools.org)

# Integrated Pest Management

An effective green cleaning program minimizes the use of potentially toxic chemicals in all areas of building maintenance. Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a green, safe and effective method of pest control that emphasizes pest prevention rather than the use of pesticides. An efficient IPM program includes proper building maintenance and sanitation practices, including green cleaning and monitoring pest activity. With IPM, pesticides are used only as a last resort, after a full range of alternatives has been exhausted.

## Why is IPM safer than pesticides?

Pesticides are chemicals designed to control, repel or kill pests. Exposure to pesticides has been linked to cancer and birth defects, as well as neurological, behavioral, hormonal and immune system disorders. Scientific surveys find pesticides in our food, water, homes, parks and schools. IPM allows us to control pests while reducing or eliminating dangerous chemicals.

## What about pest control devices?

A pest control device uses only physical or mechanical means. It does not include any chemicals. These devices include mouse traps, steam-disinfecting equipment, vacuums and carpet cleaning equipment and are designed to remove or kill pests. Unlike pesticides, the EPA does not require devices to be registered, but manufacturers are subject to certain labeling, packaging, record keeping and import/export requirements.

## Five Basic Steps of IPM

IPM should become a standard cleaning procedure in your green cleaning program. Implementing IPM is simple, straightforward and cost effective. Below are the five basic steps to implement an IPM program.

### 1. Keep Pests Out

Pests can't become a problem if they don't get into the building. You'll need to start with a thorough inspection to identify potential pest entry areas. Broken screens should be repaired or replaced, foundation cracks sealed, ventilation systems screened and door sweeps should be added to keep out mice. It doesn't all have to happen at once. Focus on repairing the areas of biggest concern and move on from

there. Maintaining a tight building will effectively prevent pest infestations and can have the added bonus of decreasing heating and cooling costs.

### 2. Remove Pests' Food and Water

All living things need food and water to survive. Removing food and water sources and keeping all food contact areas sanitized is key to successfully controlling pest infestation. Using green cleaning methods, cleaning to the corners and eating only in easily-cleaned areas will also help eliminate pests. Garbage and recycling should be removed from the building nightly and stored in closed containers that are cleaned consistently. In addition, leaking faucets and pipes should be repaired and standing water eliminated. Regular inspections will help to locate problem areas and prioritize actions.

### 3. Remove Shelters

Once pests enter a building, they look for a safe place to hide. An IPM program reduces their chances of finding one. Dark, quiet places such as cracks and crevices, wall voids (the space inside walls where the pipes run) and cluttered areas, as well as appliances (large and small) and vending machines are preferred nesting areas. Cracks and crevices can be sealed using caulk or other appropriate sealants. Wall voids, which may be accessed through holes in the wall, electrical conduits and even pipes under sinks, need to be sealed using the appropriate material. If mice are a problem, stuff the hole with steel wool before sealing it. Mice hate steel wool and will not gnaw through it. Appliances should be thoroughly inspected for cleanliness and pest activity.

Other areas to be aware of include wall space behind posters, cork and black boards and loose tiles and baseboards. Clutter can hide evidence of a growing pest problem. Keeping

surfaces and rooms well organized and tidy helps to identify problem areas. A cluttered storage room, for example, is impossible to clean properly, inspect for spills or damage and scour for pest evidence like droppings or nesting. Open shelving and regular cleaning can help reduce clutter. Schools may schedule decluttering days to help teachers and staff make a habit of maintaining a neat, pest-free facility.

#### **4. Monitor for Pest Activity**

Most pests are nocturnal, making it difficult to detect their activities while school is in session. Still, there are ways to monitor for pest activity without staying up all night. Monitoring traps that continuously check for pest activity can be placed in out-of-the-way places along baseboards or under large appliances, desks and equipment. These sticky traps are designed to stop insects and other pests, including baby mice, in their tracks. Sticky traps can be used to locate high-traffic areas and identify the pest.

#### **5. Treat the Existing Pest Problems**

Treatment options can be assessed once a school has identified the potential pest(s) and location(s) of the problem, and subsequently reduced food and water sources as well as hiding places. Initial treatment options should be non-chemical, such as vacuuming and trapping. If further treatment is needed, gel and containerized baits are safer alternatives and should be used instead of sprays, bombs or fumigants. Baits are designed to attract only the targeted pest. Sprays, bombs, and fumigants contain small particles that can drift to unintended targets, including carpets, desks and lunchroom tables.

#### **Your State's IPM Laws**

All across the country, communities are taking action to protect children from pesticide use in schools by establishing least-toxic pest management strategies through state and local policies.

Visit Beyond Pesticides at <http://www.beyondpesticides.org/schools> to check out a state-by-state listing of IPM laws and learn what laws affect the use of pesticides in your school.