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Auburn City Schools Awarded IPM STAR Certification: Eighth in the Nation to Earn Honor

IPM STAR reflects excellence in managing pest and pesticide hazards

AUBURN, Alabama – Auburn City Schools has earned IPM STAR status, becoming only the eighth school district in the nation to achieve the distinction. IPM STAR certification is awarded by the IPM Institute of North America, in partnership with the US EPA Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program.

Integrated Pest Management, or IPM, is an approach that relies on long-term, preventative techniques as the first line of defense against pests, including insects, rodents and weeds.

The IPM STAR program is voluntary and includes a rigorous evaluation of the school by an IPM professional, a comprehensive set of reports and recommendations, and concerted effort by school administrators, staff and contractors to meet high standards for effective, least-risk pest management.

In Auburn City Schools (ACS), both staff and outside contractors are involved in making sure pests are managed effectively with pesticide use as a last resort. “IPM is working for us, keeping pest problems to a minimum and helping to control costs,” cites Todd Freeman, assistant superintendent. “The IPM STAR process has been a good tune up for our program.”

ACS is a “Monroe Model” school, enlisted in 2001 as a pilot to test an IPM training and education program developed initially at Monroe County Community Schools Corporation (MCCSC) in Indiana. The model has proven successful in reducing pest problems and pesticide use by 85% or more in schools where it has been implemented, with no increase in pest control costs.

A team including Dr. Marc Lame from Indiana University, and John Carter and Jerry Jochim from MCCSC traveled to Auburn to help train ACS staff. Teachers, cafeteria workers and custodial staff had to “stop inviting bugs” in the ways they stored food and cleaned the classrooms and kitchens. The team also trained Dr. Fudd Graham,

entomologist and educator with the Alabama Ag Experiment Station and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, who is now replicating the model throughout the state.

“Initially, custodians ran from us,” said Graham. “They simply had their hands full and did not want anything more to do. But within a very short time, they were fully on board, including using the information they’ve learned to solve pest problems in their own homes. They’ve become valuable assets in monitoring the schools and pointing out problems. One custodian even took on a school staffer who was heading out to treat a practice field with a 20 lb. bag of diazinon for fire ants. He explained that ACS’s new policy didn’t allow that anymore, and the right thing to do was to contact the administration to have the problem resolved by a professional.” Diazinon is a toxic nerve poison for which effective, less toxic alternatives are readily available.

The pest management professional, who now serves the school district under contract, became a ready convert to the program. As Richard Lumpkin, of Lumpkin Pest Management, explains, “The schools are cleaner and they’re safer.” Lumpkin’s training and approach has won him new customers, including servicing homes of some of the school staff.

At ACS, Lumpkin manages rodents without rodenticides, which are pesticides designed to kill rats and mice. This unique approach is due in part to his sensitivity to the toxicity of these potent chemicals, after having a couple of his dogs accidentally ingest near-fatal amounts left out by a neighbor.

“By keeping the grass cut around school buildings in the summer months, we don’t have anywhere near the rodent problems we used to have each fall,” Lumpkin says. “We’d come in and find large numbers of mice, and have to spend lots of time tracking down dead mice that were killed by the rodenticide and tucked away in hard-to-reach places. Keeping them out in the first place, and trapping when we need to, saves a lot of time and trouble.”

ACS’s success has been exported to a private school in the Auburn area, and is now moving into several additional school systems throughout the state. Tools and techniques developed at ACS, including a written IPM policy and plan, will help these new school systems get up to speed quickly, and cost effectively.

IPM STAR was initiated by the IPM Institute with funding from the US Environmental Protection Agency and the National Foundation for IPM Education. The IPM Institute is an independent non-profit organization based in Madison, Wisconsin. The Institute works to increase awareness and adoption of IPM in agriculture and communities.

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