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By:

Thomas A. Green, IPM Institute of North America, Inc., Madison, WI, (608) 232-1528

Patricia Kandziora, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Madison, WI, (608) 224-4547

Roseann St. Aubin, Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, WI, (414) 475-8237

Milwaukee Public Schools Awarded IPM STAR Certification: Eighth in the Nation to Earn Honor

IPM STAR signifies excellence in managing pests and pesticide hazards

MILWAUKEE, Wisconsin – Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) has earned IPM STAR status, becoming the eighth school district in the nation to achieve this distinction. The award will be presented at a meeting of the Milwaukee Board of School Directors on November 23, 2004 in Milwaukee.

School systems typically deal with a variety of pests, including insects, rodents and weeds. Integrated Pest Management, or IPM, is an approach that relies on long-term, preventative techniques as the first line of defense. Rather than scheduling a “program” of regular pesticide applications, IPM practitioners monitor conditions using sticky traps and other means to spot pest problems early.

“By correcting conditions such as poor sanitation, leaky pipes or broken window screens,” relates Pat Kandziora, “you deny pests access to the food, water and shelter they need to survive.” Kandziora is IPM Specialist with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, and was responsible for recruiting MPS to the IPM STAR program.

The IPM STAR program is voluntary and includes a rigorous on-site evaluation, a comprehensive set of reports and recommendations, and a concerted effort by school administrators, staff and contractors to meet high standards for effective, least-risk pest management. IPM STAR certification is awarded by the IPM Institute of North America in partnership with the US EPA Pesticide Environmental Stewardship Program.

1914 Rowley Ave., Madison WI 53726

608 232-1528, Fax 608 232-1530

ipmworks@ipminstitute.org, www.ipminstitute.org

IPM at MPS had its beginnings in 1988, when Josef Roca, now Manager of Buildings, Grounds and Fleet, and Michael Gutierrez, now Project Manager for the department, were first promoted to supervisor rank. Tom Williams was director of plant operations at that time and Williams, Roca and Gutierrez recognized a need for formal training in pest management. Roca and Gutierrez began attending industry seminars and passing on what they had learned to building engineers and others.

In 2002, the Milwaukee Board of School Directors passed a resolution committing to work with Citizens for a Better Environment, a local advocacy group, to continue IPM program development. The program now covers all of the district's 154 schools and 60 recreational sites, and impacts 103,000 students.

Milwaukee's program is a standout nationally on three counts: Frequent, effective training of maintenance staff, quarterly inspections of each facility by building operations supervisors, and the commitment to sanitation by everyone from supervisors to front line staff at each building.

Harvey Klumb, pest management crew leader, now leads the training effort. He holds a day and evening training session for building operations staff every Tuesday. About 15 sessions are required to cover all of the topics including rodent monitoring and trapping, sanitation and correcting pest-conducive conditions. Klumb's success as an educator is evident in that 60 to 70% of his students pass their state licensing exams the first time, one of the best passing rates in the state. Bruce Montcalm assists Klumb in training and in supporting building engineers as they work to resolve pest issues

MPS has three supervisors who conduct quarterly inspections. Each has a list of facilities to visit and evaluate, recording results on a comprehensive form that covers not only buildings and grounds maintenance, but also the presence of pests or conditions conducive to pest activity, such as broken screens or windows, dripping faucets or leaky pipes. MPS's pro-active approach involves Gutierrez and the supervisors in the early stages of new construction and renovation projects, reviewing designs and plans for pest-related issues and suggesting changes where necessary to ensure adequate pest proofing.

An outstanding commitment to sanitation is evident in mechanical rooms, storerooms, custodial closets and other areas that are often overlooked for thorough cleaning. Particularly in older school facilities, it's not uncommon to find stacks of old furniture, books and equipment tucked away in otherwise unused portions buildings. Not so at MPS. "The floors in the mechanical rooms looked clean enough to eat from," reports Tom Green, President of the IPM Institute, who conducted the evaluation. "The inside of the trash cans, underneath the plastic liners, were also spotless."

Building engineers are responsible for maintaining clean and uncluttered buildings and grounds. They also serve as the IPM front line when pest problems occur, including solving problems permanently whenever possible. "We used to have a pest reporting form that didn't put any responsibility on the building engineer," says Gutierrez. "Now we make sure the engineer is doing everything he or she can do before Bruce or Harvey have to go out." Each school has a weed-eater for trimming where mowers don't reach. Ice scrapers are also used to remove weeds growing up through pavement.

MPS's problem-solving approach is evident in improvements made at South Division High School, one of the facilities selected for on-site evaluation as part of the IPM STAR process. Frequent rodent, ant and cockroach problems in the past were greatly reduced by improving sanitation. MPS staff cleaned up the receiving area at the school, inside and out. They moved dumpsters away from the building and worked with the city to remove trash and manage weeds on adjacent vacant lots. MPS

also changed the waste removal contractor district-wide, to improve dumpster quality and maintenance, and increasing the frequency of trash pickup.

Further evidence of a well-managed program is excellent staff retention. Roca has 34 years with the system, Gutierrez has 29 years; Klumb has 14 years and Montcalm 7 years. Sandra Hudy, a Building Operations supervisor who conducts quarterly inspections of facilities among other duties, has 17 years on the job. Bill Kay, building engineer at South Division, has 35 years with MPS. Kay is a very satisfied member of the IPM team, describing the program as “110% better than when I started.”

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. Visit the Institute’s website at www.ipminstitute.org for more information.

Contact:

Thomas Green, Ph.D., President, IPM Institute of North America, 1914 Rowley Ave., Madison WI 53726, (608) 232-1528, Fax (608) 232-1530, ipmworks@ipminstitute.org

Michael Gutierrez, Project Manager of Buildings, Grounds and Fleet, Milwaukee Public Schools, Division of Facilities and Maintenance Services, 1124 N. 11th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53233, (414) 283-4789, gutiermr@mail.milwaukee.k12.wi.us

Patricia Kandziora, IPM Program Manager/Chemist, Agricultural Resources Management Division, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Madison, WI 53708, (608) 224-4547, Fax (608) 224-4656, patricia.kandziora@datcp.state.wi.us

Roseann St. Aubin, Communications Director, Milwaukee Public Schools, 5225 W. Vliet St., Milwaukee, WI 53208, (414) 475-8237, Fax (414) 475-8430, staubir@mail.milwaukee.k12.wi.us