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New tool to help schools calculate the costs of IPM

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IPM is frequently promoted as an effective means of reducing risks of both pests and pesticides in public school settings. Nevertheless, due to lack of standards, policies or regulations requiring the use of IPM in most states, implementation of IPM among school districts has been slow.

A perception that implementing IPM costs more than conventional pest control may be one reason that IPM adoption among schools lags nationwide. However, a statewide survey of 554 school district IPM coordinators in Texas, where IPM is mandatory, showed that nearly 54% of respondents felt that IPM *reduced* their long-term cost of pest management. Results of the Texas survey showed that one of the least commonly adopted IPM practices among school districts was prioritizing building repair and maintenance needs (i.e., for pest proofing and sanitation improvements). Such costs are rarely considered in IPM cost-benefit analyses, yet are one of the most important considerations when designing an IPM program to reduce the need for pesticides.

A heuristic, Excel spreadsheet-based, decision tool was developed to project the probable costs of IPM. The IPM Cost-calculator provides users with an estimate of overall pest risk of the school being evaluated, a facilities maintenance pest management budget and a prioritized list of suggested facility improvements. The tool was demonstrated to approximately 84 Texas school districts in 2006-2007 and the pest risk function output was compared to subjective risk scores by experts in 11 school districts in Maine, Florida, Alabama and California in 2007. Low correlation between the subjective ratings provided by experts and the calculator-generated risk ratings indicated that the calculator risk function may need further refinement. However, interest in the calculator as a budgeting and planning tool was high. Half of the surveyed maintenance administrators (n=8) said they were “highly likely” to use the calculator tool in their budgeting process.

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