

Program Reduces Pesticide Use in Phoenix School District

By Joanne Littlefield

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(From left):
Marc Lane,
University of
Indiana
entomologist;
Robert C.
Briscoe, Jr.,
Kyrene School
District
president; and
Bruce
Tabashnik,
head, UA
Department of
Entomology.

Students flocking back to school last year in Phoenix's Kyrene School District didn't have to leave campus a day or two each month while the schools were sprayed for bugs. An award-winning pilot program in integrated pest management (IPM) has reduced pesticide spraying around buildings while still keeping the pests under control.

For their efforts, the Kyrene School District and the University of Arizona College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Entomology Department were recently presented with an award from the National Foundation for Integrated Pest Management Education.

"Making schools safer for kids by reducing pesticide use is the right thing to do," says Bruce Tabashnik, head of the UA department of entomology. "We're delighted to provide the expertise that makes this possible. It's why we're here."

The approach focuses on identifying key pests and using nonchemical means for keeping them out, such as sealing openings around pipes and crawl spaces, repairing drains and building slabs, and trimming back trees.

An initial three-school pilot project was undertaken in 2000 with assistance from UA entomologists and representatives of the Arizona Structural Pest Control Board. This included a walk-through pest audit, educational programs on exclusion techniques, and sanitation measures such as tracking down and clearing pest habitat. The subsequent 85 to 90 percent reduction in the use of pesticides at the three schools encouraged the district to expand it to all 25 schools.

This is the second award this project has received. In May 2001, the department of entomology was honored by region 9 of the Environmental Protection Agency for "Outstanding efforts to protect children's health and the environment through the initiation of Integrated Pest Management into the Kyrene School District." The award was presented to UA entomology faculty members Dawn Gouge, Kirk Smith, Carl Olson and Paul Baker.

Because of its success, the Kyrene Schools IPM program is serving as a model for other schools in the Southwest, including several on the Navajo Nation. Marc Lane, the University of Indiana entomologist who brought the pilot program to a nationwide audience, has met with the Environmental Protection Agency to discuss the success of the program.

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