

## A lesson on controlling bugs

MCCSC program to reduce chemical use a model for other schools

By Laura Lane, Herald-Times Staff Writer March 17, 1999

Bloomington High School South junior Matt Gibson may not know it, but pyrethroids, carbamates and organo-phosphates are no longer a part of his school day.

The Monroe County Community School Corp. has stopped spraying chemicals to kill bugs.

Before outlawing chemical spraying except for emergency infestations, MCCSC sprayed a total of about 25 gallons of chemicals in schools each year.

Those days are gone.

Parents such as Linda Boyle-Gibson appreciate the departure of pesticides from the schools. Since her son was 2, the family has battled his allergies to chemicals and dyes.

"I think we as a society are poisoning ourselves without thinking much about it," she said.

"I'm so glad to see the schools take a stand to decrease the amount of pollution we breathe."

Now, schools follow an integrated pest management plan that virtually eliminates traditional bug spraying. The districtwide program, which began as an experiment at three elementary schools, is in its third year.

So instead of spraying poison to kill cockroaches, for instance, custodians no longer stack cardboard boxes that attract the insects.

Kids are encouraged to keep crumbs off the floor. Pack ratlike teachers are being asked to get rid of piled-up papers and accumulated stuff.

Food for classroom hamsters is now kept in airtight containers.

If you take away food, water and places to establish residence, bugs will flee to more friendly turf.

You don't have to drown them in pyrethrins.



Jerry Jochim, integrated pest manager for the Monroe County Community School Corp., uses a flashlight to detect possible entry points for pests at University Elementary School Tuesday. Today, MCCSC planning director John Carter and Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs professor Mark Lame are in Washington, D.C., promoting the success of MCCSC's local no-spray program at an Environmental Protection Agency-sponsored seminar. Staff photo by Chris Howell

Today, MCCSC planning director John Carter and Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs Professor Mark Lane are in Washington, D.C., promoting the success of the local no-spray program.

They are presenting a workshop at an EPA-sponsored seminar to educate people from around the country about the benefits and successes of pesticide reduction.

"I was skeptical, but now that I know it works I think we need to diffuse the information and let people know about the absolute success we've seen," Carter said. "It doesn't happen overnight, but we hope the word gets out so that this can spread to schools, businesses and homes."

He said that besides cleaning up clutter and keeping food and crumbs off surfaces, people can use common sense to keep bugs at bay.

"Besides sanitation, there's structural control," he explained. "Weather-stripping on doors, caulking holes in the walls, repairing window screens, putting mesh over heating and air-conditioning vents — these things keep bugs out."

The schools have small bait traps around and when bugs appear, custodians spread a small amount of bait, usually a pencil-thin line a quarter inch long.

"We have eliminated 90 percent of the pesticide application and the bait that we use is essentially nontoxic to humans and light years beyond the liquid spray chemicals we used to use," Carter said.

The new "get-rid-of-bugs" technology is a far cry from pest control in the 1980s, Carter said.

"We used to set off bombs and fog the schools with chemicals," he said. "We did our own pest control and had a guy with a ventilator mask who would go out and set off pesticide bombs in the schools over the weekend."

Nowadays, people are more concerned about chemical use. For instance, Carter said, environmentalists were behind proposed legislation that would have required school officials to notify parents in advance of pesticide spraying in the schools.

The bill didn't advance, he said, but may come up again. Arizona, Michigan and Texas have gone a step farther, requiring integrated pest management programs in public schools.

"That may be what it takes to get this into all the schools," Carter said.

Cost is an issue, but Carter showed how in the end schools can save money.

For instance, MCCSC was sending about \$30,000 a year to pesticide companies to spray the schools. Now, the district employs a person for about \$40,000 who spends half of his time overseeing the pest control program.

"We're saving money in the end, and the schools are healthier," Carter said.

Reporter Laura Lane can be reached at 331-4362 or by e-mail at [lane@heraldt.com](mailto:lane@heraldt.com).



Jerry Jochim holds a few of the traps to demonstrate their size and use. The traps provide three entrances for roaches, with a sticky bottom to trap them and a little roach pheromone to attract them. Staff photo by Chris Howell

