

Bug experts want kids protected from pesticides

By John Meunier, Herald-Times Staff Writer May 23, 2002

It takes a special kind of dedication to dress up like a giant cockroach to get your message out.

Al Fournier wore the costume at a recent statewide meeting for day-care providers to raise awareness of pest control programs that de-emphasize poison spray.

The director of a Purdue University integrated pest management program got to keep more of his dignity at a Bloomington workshop Wednesday. The only ridicule he had to endure were the anti-Purdue barbs of his fellow bug expert and Indiana University professor Marc Lame.

The two "bug guys" spent the day talking with a small group of care providers, state regulators and others about the virtues of integrated pest management and the way the concept can be applied to day-care settings.

Lame, a committed advocate of methods that eliminate indoor bug control problems by trying to keep bugs out of buildings in the first place, pointed out the problems with traditional treatments.

"We don't want pests for the children, but we also don't want to expose them to neurotoxins," Lame said.

The workshop group toured Monroe County United Ministries and the Bloomington Development Learning Center to see the specific things each center is doing to control pests.

Along the tour, Lame hunted out sticky bug traps in corners of rooms to inspect them for signs of noxious pests.

"Just a few spiders and a mosquito," he said holding up a white paper trap. "That's good."

He dropped down on his back to reach under shelving units for scraps of food.

"When we ask people to clean, they need to clean for pests, not just for people," he said.

He showed the group a well lit pantry with food neatly arranged on wire shelves that make it easy to inspect the floors and walls around the units.

"This is cool, from a bug guy's point of view," he said.

Integrated pest management is as much about changing the behavior of humans as it is about attacking pests.

Meri Reinhold, executive director of Monroe County United Ministries, told the workshop about seemingly simple things that her organization has done — eliminate cardboard that

cockroaches love, seal the bottom of outside doors, reduce clutter and always be mindful of things that invite pests into buildings.

Reinhold's day-care facility is one of four in Indiana serving as models for integrated pest management programs that the Indiana Department of Environmental Management hopes will spread.

The pilot program is the first of its kind in the country.

The Bloomington Developmental Learning Center is another model site. The other two sites are in Indianapolis and Gary.

Joy Willet, executive director of the Bloomington Developmental Learning Center, said being part of the program has been a learning experience.

"It just causes you to think in a different way," she said. "You learn a lot more about bugs than you ever dreamed you learn about bugs."

Reinhold said she and her staff have learned to think about pest issues even when deciding to reseed the lawn. She learned that most grass seed includes clover, which attracts bees — a hazard for young children.

The approach doesn't eliminate pest problems completely. A recent ant infestation required spraying to wipe out. But it has virtually eliminated the need for poison spraying around the toddlers and preschoolers who use the facility.

"Integrated pest management is a process, it is not a miracle," Lame said.

Monroe County Community Schools Corp. has been implementing the program since 1994 and still has more to do, he said. But the school corporation has reduced its pest problem 90 percent while reducing its use of pesticides by nearly 90 percent.

The day-care initiative is the next step in a campaign by Lame to gain wider acceptance of the methods. It requires not only educating the day-care providers, but also bringing state and local regulators on board.

"They're not trained to think about it the way we are trying to think about it," Reinhold said. "While any right thinking person wouldn't want to expose children to pesticides, (the inspectors') mission is to have everything be pristine. Life isn't pristine all the time."

For more information about integrated pest management, visit www.entm.purdue.edu/Entomology/outreach/schoolipm/default.htm.

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