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IPM Program Wraps Up Successful Philly Project to Get the Bugs Out

PHILADELPHIA, Pa. – A Penn State Cooperative Extension program recently wrapped up a successful project that educated urban communities in Philadelphia about safely dealing with common household pests.

The Pennsylvania Integrated Pest Management Program (PA IPM) through the Philadelphia School and Community IPM Partnership (PSCIP) sponsored an innovative, educational, community outreach project targeting low-income row house communities in Philadelphia.

Integrated pest management (IPM) is a safe, effective, and scientific approach to managing pests. IPM combines knowledge of pest identity and biology and its relationship within the environment along with pest monitoring. IPM focuses on prevention and advocates using least toxic pesticides if needed to lessen the human health side effects associated with pesticide misuse.

According to Rhonda Griffin, IPM home health educator with PA IPM, the project focused on 19 homes in four Philadelphia row house neighborhoods. “Row house communities can have unique pest problems due to their close proximity. What affects one resident will often affect another because of their shared walls,” she explains. Griffin met with neighbors and encouraged them to share information about the types of pest activity they were having in their homes. She found that when neighbors shared information, it removed the stigma normally associated with pest problems and encouraged them to adopt IPM practices. Implementing the same techniques brought greater success.



Row house project participant Mary Anderson



Mrs. Crawford and Rhonda Griffin look over “IPM Resource Kits”

At the beginning of the project, participants were surveyed about their attitudes and knowledge of pests as well as the measures they took to control pests in their homes. Then personal home assessments were made and letters were sent to residents regarding observations along with recommendations. "I met with residents, discussed IPM tactics, and explained how eliminating conditions that allow pest to survive in their home will reduce their need for toxic pesticides," says Griffin. "Good sanitation, proper storage practices, eliminating clutter and sealing openings throughout the home which may be a source of entry for pests are key. Preventative actions like these can stop a pest problem before it starts."

Participants were also given "IPM Resource Kits". The kits included educational publications on IPM for homes, caulk and caulk guns to seal openings, mouse and insect glue traps, roach bait stations, and green cleaning products along with easy do-it-yourself recipes. The kits also contained information sheets on the importance of reading product labels and how to determine its toxicity. Information sheets for choosing least-toxic cleaning products were given in relation to asthma, cancer and other health concerns the residents had.



Mrs. Harris and Rhonda Griffin look over "IPM Resource Kits"

At the end of the project, post surveys were done which showed many residents made safer pest control decisions once they were informed about the dangers of pesticide misuse and how small structural repairs can eliminate pest problems. One resident and cancer survivor stated she usually sprayed her home every month even when she didn't see any pest activity. "I thought this was safe since I left the house right afterwards, but because of project I learned that I am still exposed to dangerous toxins from the chemicals. Now, I use pesticide baits or mouse and insect traps instead."

According to Griffin, the project produced additional positive outcomes. "Besides improved pest management, the project created a greater sense of unity within the community," she explains. "Pest problems can be embarrassing, but when you share your experiences with neighbors it really makes you feel more connected, a sort of lost bond in urban living." All participants said the project was beneficial and informative and that they would share the information with others both in and outside of their communities. Griffin stresses that she and other members of PSCIP are still available to answer questions and give advice about least-toxic pest management.

Project support was provided by EPA Region III's Pesticide Environmental Stewardship program. Participants will receive a certificate at an EPA ceremony in January.

The PA IPM formed PSCIP three years ago as a community outreach initiative in Philadelphia to provide kid-safe pest control education. For more information on PSCIP and community IPM, visit Web site <http://www.pscip.org>. Or, you may contact Michelle Niedermeier at the Philadelphia IPM office, phone (215) 471-2200, ext. 109, or e-mail mxn14@psu.edu.

The Pennsylvania IPM program is collaboration between the Pennsylvania State University and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture aimed at promoting integrated pest management in both agricultural and urban settings. For more information, contact the program at (814) 865-2839, or Web site <http://www.paipm.org>. To view our archived news releases, see Web site <http://paipm.cas.psu.edu/newsrelease.html>.

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Editors Contact:
Kristie Auman-Bauer
PA IPM Program
(814) 865-2839
kma147@psu.edu