

A. Grant Data

- Grant #: 8365
- Title: School IPM Leadership Training Program -- Developing a Learning Community
- Type: IWG Priority
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- State involved: New York
- Funding Years: June 2004 through June 2006
- Funding amount: \$53,785

B. Summary

Children, because of their size and developmental stage, are more vulnerable to pesticides than adults. To protect them we must decrease pesticide use in schools. Yet we cannot compromise the quality of pest control because pests such as cockroaches and mice present equally important health hazards. Pest management in schools is challenging because of the variety of heavily used settings, including classrooms, cafeterias, auditoriums, and playing fields. A 2002 statewide survey revealed that many New York State schools want to adopt IPM but they need in-depth training, technical assistance, and on-going support.

Our long-term goal is to help all of the state's 703 school districts adopt IPM, protecting over 3 million students by reducing the risks posed by pests and pesticides. We've laid the foundation for this effort by working with over 150 schools. Now, the next step: developing a model school IPM program that can be replicated throughout the state (and later, the region) and training local leaders to guide IPM adoption in schools.

We'll begin with school buildings and grounds personnel in four school districts. As part of their intensive hands-on training, they, with their peer mentors and IPM trainers, will develop and refine the model. Each school will be allotted up to \$6,000 to help implement its IPM plan. Their goal: become eligible for the national "IPM certified school" standard created by the IPM Institute of America. The level of risk reduction achieved by each school will be evaluated using this standard. Later, our IPM leaders will educate and mentor their peers.

C. Introduction

One of the strengths and challenges of IPM is its reliance on a site-specific strategy. Although this means that IPM is easily tailored to address the needs of schools with dramatically different circumstances, the approach requires knowledge of pests and their environments, familiarity with the many IPM tactics, and experience in developing and implementing an IPM plan, which requires the cooperation of the whole staff. To secure this cooperation, the school needs a leader who will educate, inspire, and guide others.

This two-year project based in the lower Hudson Valley will establish a network of such leaders, school buildings and grounds personnel, who are trained IPM practitioners and advocates. By working with a small local group, we hope to establish close relationships among our participants, so they will continue to support each other's IPM efforts long after the project ends. This "learning community" would include the participants, IPM trainers (NYS IPM Program staff and local Cooperative Extension educators), and peer mentors (two award-winning school pest managers from the downstate area).

The project director will reserve \$6,000 for each school, to help defray the cost of implementing IPM (a major constraint to IPM adoption, according to our 2002 survey). Interviews at some of these schools in 2003 highlighted some of their major pest management concerns, such as the need for constituency outreach, improved sanitation, heavy use of athletic fields, and specific pests such as stinging insects, ants, mice, weeds, and geese. The IPM trainers' initial evaluation of the school's pest management practices will supply detailed information for the development of their IPM plans.

In addition to developing and implementing an IPM plan, some schools will volunteer to run IPM research and demonstration projects on topics most relevant to the group. Examples might include nontoxic management of stinging insects, cost-effective repairs that most effectively exclude rodents from buildings, or over-seeding as an alternative to herbicide applications on athletic fields.

D. Objectives

Objective 1: Organize the "learning community" team that will develop the four model programs. Accomplished during the summer of 2004.

Objective 2: Utilize the IPM Institute's "IPM Standards for Schools" to assess the current status of the pest management programs of the cooperating schools. Accomplished during the autumn of 2004.

Objective 3: Develop and pursue individualized IPM improvement plans via collaborative interaction among the four cooperating school districts, extension IPM specialists, and peer mentors. The goal will be qualification for the IPM Institute's STAR school certification. This is the current active phase of the project.

Objective 4: Evaluate the success of the cooperating districts' IPM development plans. This will be done during the spring of 2006.

Objective 5: Communicate the results of the four model programs locally, statewide, and throughout the Northeast. This will be done during the spring and early summer of 2006.

E. Approach

The goal is for the cooperating school districts to become eligible for the IPM Institute's STAR school IPM certification. Using the IPM Institute's on-site auditing procedures, the project's team will intensively evaluate the pest management policies and practices of the school districts. Based on the results of the audits and incorporating individual district desires, the cooperating districts will develop and submit IPM improvement plans. Via the project's listserv and one-on-one interaction, the project's team will collectively assist the cooperating districts in accomplishing their plans.

Toward the end of the two-year project, each school district will be reassessed using the IPM Institute's auditing procedure. The project team will then meet to discuss the results and over-all success of the project. One or more of the districts will host demonstration workshops highlighting aspects of IPM implementation. The NYS IPM Program will document the entire project as case studies for selected educational and pest management publications.

F. Progress

Objective 1: Organize the "learning community" team that will develop the four model programs.

Four school districts agreed to participate in the project. The districts are Minisink Valley, Monroe-Woodbury, New Paltz, and Scarsdale. Key personnel from the districts, NYS IPM Program staff, local county extension educators, peer mentors, and Tom Green from the IPM Institute met in June 2004. During this meeting, we reviewed the basic concepts and tenets of IPM in schools. Tom Green then described the IPM Institute's STAR certification program, and we discussed its role our project. Finally we discussed the general process of the project, the school districts' needs and desires, and the scheduling of the initial assessments.

Objective 2: Utilize the IPM Institute's "IPM Standards for Schools" to assess the current status of the pest management programs of the cooperating schools.

The IPM Institute had recently developed a concise version of the "IPM Standards for Schools" for STAR certification audits. During October 2004, the project's assessment team (NYS IPM Program staff, extension educators, and peer mentors) visited the four cooperating school districts and using this audit format, conducted detailed assessments of the districts' pest management programs. The assessments took a full day per district rather than a half-day as originally planned. Several of the assessment team made follow-up visits to two of the school districts for further evaluation of athletic fields. Also, the districts' structural pest control contractors were interviewed by myself and one other team member. Each district sent me a list of pesticides used within the past year. These were evaluated using a risk assessment database provided by the IPM Institute.

Each assessment team member filed with me an audit report for each school district. I consolidated and summarized these into one report for each district. These were sent to the appropriate district along with a cover letter highlighting strengths of the district's pest management program and major areas of suggested improvement.

Objective 3: Develop and pursue individualized IPM improvement plans via collaborative interaction among the four cooperating school districts, extension IPM specialists, and peer mentors. The goal will be qualification for the IPM Institute's STAR school certification.

A listserv was established to facilitate interaction among the project participants. The school districts were to develop and post pest management development plans by mid-January 2005. Two of the districts met this deadline.

In August 2005, the project team met for a mid-point evaluation of the project. The status of the school districts' pest management development plans were reported and discussed. Plans were made for the team to assist the districts as they continued to implement their plans. In addition to (and overlapping with) the individual details of each plan, the project team will focus on two major projects. Each project will be highlighted by a workshop next spring. One project will focus on IPM-related improvements to athletic fields in the cooperating districts. The second project will address classroom sanitation and incorporate teacher/student outreach via IPM curricula.

Just prior to the mid-point meeting, the Project Director dropped the New Paltz School District from the project. Serious conflicts between the district administration and the facilities department made achievement of the project's goals unlikely.

Objective 4: Evaluate the success of the cooperating districts' IPM development plans.

Using the IPM Institute's STAR certification audit form, the school districts will have their final assessment in early April 2006. Since the focus will be on areas highlighted by the initial assessment, this audit is anticipated to only take a half-day per district. The entire team will then meet to discuss the results and the over-all success of the project.

Objective 5: Communicate the results of the four model programs locally, statewide, and throughout the Northeast.

In May 2006, the school districts will host two demonstration workshops. One workshop will highlight IPM-related improvements to the districts' athletic fields. The other will focus on classroom sanitation and teacher/student outreach.

A NYS IPM Program writer will document the project as case studies for selected educational and pest management publications.