



*The Pennsylvania*  
**INTEGRATED PEST  
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**



Pennsylvania Department of  
AGRICULTURE

## News Release

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### **Asthma Initiative Links Pest Control and Public Health**

PHILADELPHIA, Pa. -- It's a story often heard in urban areas. A family moves into an apartment and discovers it's overrun by cockroaches, rodents and other pests. The residents repeatedly treat the home with pesticides and even hire an exterminator, but the problem isn't going away. In addition, concerns arise about children's chronic exposure to indoor pesticides. What now?

As a public health educator for the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, it's a story Marta Hernandez hears often. And, as the environmental projects coordinator for the department's Asthma Initiative, she has additional concerns. "Many people are unaware pests such as cockroaches and rodents are asthma triggers, as are many of the pesticides used to treat them," Hernandez says. "Urban living conditions are often conducive to high pest infestations, and children under five are at the greatest risk of pest- and pesticide-related health problems. Poor pest control practices shift costs from the housing system to the health care system."

Hernandez stresses the best way to change people's behaviors is through education, and a public health message may accomplish more than simply advocating safer pest control. "We need to tie integrated pest management to public health education because there are costs associated with both pest control and the health effects of pests and pesticides on residents," Hernandez explained as a guest speaker at the Philadelphia School and Community IPM Partnership (PSCIP) annual meeting in August. PSCIP was formed five years ago by the Pennsylvania IPM Program (PA IPM) as a community outreach initiative in Philadelphia. IPM, or integrated pest management is a safe, effective, and scientific approach to managing pests. IPM uses knowledge of pests' habits and needs to help residents implement pest prevention tactics as a first line of defense. Because pesticides are poisonous, they are chosen only as a temporary tool. Only pesticide products that pose the least-toxic, least risk of exposure to residents are chosen. Information about proper use, storage and disposal of pesticide products is also critical to avoid personal and environmental contamination.

Hernandez explained that in New York City, the Asthma Initiative is partnering with pest control operators to conduct detailed demonstrations on how to control mice and cockroaches safely and effectively in 500 inner-city rental units. "We hire pest control operators to do inspections and educate residents in participating communities about pests, health and safety issues, and do any necessary remediation. We also work with

doctors and case managers of the residents who suffer from asthma, who encourage their patients to participate in the program.”

Hernandez says she calls residents after the inspections to check their level of satisfaction and ask them to name three things they will do to control pests more safely. “If they are satisfied and are seeing and reporting favorable results, then our work is justified.”

In addition, the Asthma Initiative has begun an IPM pilot project in two NYC public schools, conducts IPM and environmental asthma triggers training available for day care staff and parents, and will conduct IPM interventions/demonstration as part of the Asthma Center of Excellence in Manhattan opening this fall.

The Asthma Initiative has been successful in demonstrating to the community and pest control companies how to safely and effectively control pests, shifting from a direct service to a capacity-building approach. “Community-based organizations are partnering in the project and helping to promote changes to improve the environmental health in the community, and new collaborations have also been forged between the Asthma Initiative and several other Department of Health programs,” Hernandez explained. “Additionally, pest control companies are gaining experience in organizing education sessions with community-based organizations and city agencies, and health organizations are able to coordinate services to their patients and follow-up care.

There are challenges, however. “There are a limited number of pest control operators who have the ability and/or are interested in participating in the project, and it can be difficult to recruit building management companies who are willing to adopt IPM practices for their tenants,” Hernandez says. Nonetheless, they plan on overcoming these obstacles and will increase their efforts to promote IPM reimbursements by HMO’s, ensure health codes are modified to assure the adopting of IPM by building owners, and increase allergy testing for those with asthma.

In Philadelphia, PSCIP is learning from New York City’s innovative approach. Michelle Niedermeier, PSCIP Coordinator, explains “We have a great group of partners in Philadelphia that includes many health organizations, especially those focusing on asthma, so we are hopeful about initiating a similar project here.” For more information on PSCIP, including meeting minutes, partners in the initiative, and current and future activities, 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](mailto:mxn14@psu.edu).

For more information on the Asthma Initiative, contact Hernandez at (212) 690 -1905, ext. 203, or by e-mail at [mhernan1@health.nyc.gov](mailto:mhernan1@health.nyc.gov). You may also visit their Web site at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/asthma/asthma.shtml>.

The Pennsylvania IPM program is a 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>.  
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