



The Pennsylvania
**INTEGRATED PEST
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**



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AGRICULTURE

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Bug Bomb Blazes

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. – Over 500 fires and explosions a year in the United States are caused by “total release foggers”, also known as “bug bombs.” According to the EPA, these pesticide products contain aerosol propellants that release all of their contents into the air of a room to kill pests such as cockroaches, mice and fleas.

Because these aerosol propellants are highly flammable, improper use may cause a fire or explosion. Some cities, such as Philadelphia, have requirements such as notifying the fire department and all occupants of the building 24 hours in advance of use, posting warning signs, and vacating the property. Since foggers are so flammable, all ignition sources must be turned off, including pilot lights and any other open flames.

According to the EPA, many accidents involving total release foggers have occurred when homeowners release an excessive amount of fogging material and forget to turn off an ignition source. In 2003, a San Diego house was blown apart when well-meaning residents planted 19 bug bombs in a house and forgot to extinguish a wall heater pilot light. No one was hurt, although several cockroaches survived the blast.

According to Steve Jacobs, extension entomologist at Penn State, the most effective way to reduce or eliminate pest problems and risks posed by pesticides is to first prevent these pests from entering your home. “Around the home, remove sources of food and water, such as repairing leaky pipes, and destroy pest shelters and breeding sites by removing litter and plant debris.”

Such measures are tactics used in an integrated pest management, or IPM, strategy. IPM 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.

If a homeowner has a severe infestation and IPM tactics aren’t working, Jacobs recommends they forgo using “over the counter” foggers and bug bombs and seek assistance from a professional pest control company. Jacobs says that besides being flammable, the use of foggers requires extensive preparations and follow-up because they may be toxic. “Exposed food and dishes must be removed or covered before using a

fogger, and all people, pets and plants must be removed from the house. All food preparation surfaces must be thoroughly cleaned after the treatment.”

Experienced pest control companies know about the biology of the pests and what to look for, are schooled in proper pest management techniques, and have an assortment of management tools at their disposal. Jacobs says when choosing a pest control company, make sure the company meets all the legal requirements that qualifies them to service your home. This includes a Pennsylvania Pesticide Applicator Certification or Registered Technician card, a business license and general liability insurance coverage. “You should also ask for a list of local references so you can learn about their past performance in treating pest infestations. They should be able to answer your questions in regard to the pest and its treatment.” For more information, download Penn State’s Pesticide Education Program’s free publication *Choosing a Qualified Pest Management or Lawn Care Company* at Web site <http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/FreePubs/pdfs/uo219.pdf>.

In addition, many people are unaware pests such as cockroaches and rodents are asthma triggers, as are many of the pesticides used to treat them, including foggers. “Indoor air quality has a big effect on asthma sufferers, especially children who spend most of their time indoors at home and at school,” says Lyn Garling of the Pennsylvania IPM program. “One component of indoor air quality includes the levels of pests and pesticide use inside buildings,” For more information on pests and pesticides and their effects on public health, visit the PA IPM Program’s Web site at <http://www.paipm.org/> and click on ‘Public Health’.

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>. To view our archived news releases, see Web site <http://paipm.cas.psu.edu/10.htm>.