



Cornell University Program on Breast Cancer and Environmental Risk Factors in New York State (BCERF)

Talking About Pesticides with Your Customers: A Guide for the Pest Manager

Many homeowners who hire commercial landscapers or pest control professionals are concerned about the use of pesticides and their effect on health and the environment. Commercial pest management companies are faced with the challenge of managing pests effectively while minimizing potential health risks and preventing environmental contamination.

Communicating with your customers and understanding their concerns about pesticide exposure is an essential part of a successful commercial pest management business. Improving communication about health and safety practices can set your company apart from others. The integrated pest management (IPM) approach is one that offers promise as a way to address consumer and environmental concerns.

IPM is a systematic approach to pest control that focuses on long term prevention. IPM can be used in a variety of settings to reduce pesticide use and minimize pesticide exposure while maintaining good control of the pest. Adapting to the basic principles of IPM may be a major change for some commercial pesticide applicators. Conventional pest management practices used the application of pesticides as a safeguard, treating for problems before they were manifested in the landscape. The conventional (and not always environmentally-sound) approach was to spray on a scheduled basis, whether it was needed or not.

Even in the absence of conclusive scientific research concerning the relationship of pesticides to cancer and other diseases, there are many sound reasons to take precautions and reduce pesticide exposure. Modification of your pest control policies can reduce the risk of pesticide exposure to you, your employees and customers.

PUBLIC CONCERNS

Being responsive to public concerns about pesticides and health can be an effective marketing tool. It may also give your company a competitive business edge. People who work with pesticides sometimes tend to dismiss public concerns as illogical or misinformed. Meaningful communication requires a willingness to listen and look at both sides of the issue. A true understanding comes about when you step back from your position and look at the issue through the eyes of your customer.

Major topics of public concern:

- Risk of cancer or other health effects
- Groundwater contamination
- Air pollution
- Food safety
- Child safety

Public concerns about health and the environment may reflect important historical events, including the discovery of DDT's harmful effects and its removal from the market, as well as present-day concerns, such as the lack of scientific knowledge about combined or cumulative effects of pesticide exposure. The emphasis on "bad news" in radio, television and print media may lead some to feel that the benefits of pesticide use are not being considered. The media may also remind the public that they have little control over some pesticide exposures. Furthermore, this may contribute to a lack of confidence in government institutions and expert opinions, which seem to the public to shift frequently. Indeed there are daily discoveries coming out of scientific research, but conflicting conclusions and lingering gaps in knowledge contribute to opposing viewpoints. Although you cannot resolve these problems, being open to your customers' concerns and up-to-date on some of these important issues can help your business establish a higher level of credibility.

IMPROVING YOUR ROLE AS THE PEST MANAGER

If you choose to adopt the IPM approach as a way to manage pests, you may have to modify some of your current pest control practices. The approach is very simple: practice prevention, treat only when necessary, and use the safest available alternative



to do the job. IPM involves careful monitoring for pests, and the use of a wide range of methods to exclude, remove, drive away, or kill pests with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment. A combination of cultural, mechanical, biological, and other techniques is used; chemical controls are a last resort. (To learn more about IPM see *RESOURCES FOR THE PEST MANAGER* on page 4.)

Pest identification. Proper pest identification is the key to IPM and the most important aspect of the pest manager's job. A good pest manager uses expert knowledge of pest life cycles to determine when pests are most susceptible to control measures. An understanding of the pest's interactions with other organisms within its environment is also required. The pest manager must integrate this knowledge with the tools and techniques of IPM to manage not one, but often several pests at the same time.

Pest tolerance levels. Not only does the pest manager have to deal with pests; he or she will have to deal with the expectations and concerns of the client. Customer attitudes toward how the landscape looks are often a major factor when determining pest tolerance levels. Some clients may be able to tolerate a higher level of damage than others. The pest manager should discuss the major pests with clients to assist in determining their tolerance levels.

Continuing education. The pest manager must also spend time on self-education, not just to meet recertification requirements, but also to keep current with the most recent changes in the field. With continued emphasis on health and the environment, pest management will undoubtedly continue to focus on implementing a variety of tools and environmentally-sound alternatives to conventional chemical pesticides.

AN EDUCATED CLIENT MAKES THE BEST CUSTOMER

Take the time to talk to your customers about the IPM strategies of your company. Define the role and responsibility of all people who will be involved in the IPM program. This includes establishing good communication between the customer and your company and also with other individuals involved in the maintenance of the property. Emphasize the significance of the IPM program and explain exactly what will be involved and why.

Do not lead anyone to expect perfection. The IPM program will need adequate time to show the desired results. Your customer must be educated to this fact and be willing to accept minor levels of pest damage, especially in the early stages of the program. Conventional pest management practices provide a "quick fix" in many situations for impatient customers with unrealistic expectations. In most cases this approach is temporary and pest problems return. Total eradication of a pest is not practical, especially when integrating biological control measures into the overall pest management scheme. On the other hand, biological controls are not the answer to all pest problems, but may be a useful component of a good IPM program.

Writing and sending a company newsletter monthly or quarterly may be a good way to educate and communicate with your customers. Include updates about plant diseases and insect sightings, pest problems related to current weather conditions and information about good cultural practices.

RESPONDING TO CUSTOMER QUESTIONS

Q. Can you give me prior notification before a pesticide is applied?

Article 33, Title 10 of the Environmental Conservation Law requires commercial companies in New York State (NYS), applying pesticides to the ground, trees or shrubs on public or private outdoor property to provide customers with written contracts specifying the approximate date or dates of applications. In addition, the contract must specify the number of applications, the total cost of the service, a list of the substances to be applied and a copy of the label for each substance that will be applied. You can also advise the customer that your company will give notice by telephone the day before a scheduled pesticide application.

Q. If a decision is made to use a pesticide, who will make the application?

Show the customer your valid NYS DEC Pesticide Applicator Certification Card. Explain that applicators working for your company are required by NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) law to undergo extensive training, certification, and licensing, as well as to keep strict records concerning all pesticides that are used.



Q. What pesticide are you using?

Prior to the application, tell the customer exactly what pesticide you are using and supply a copy of the manufacturer's label. Include any warnings that appear on the label that are pertinent to the protection of humans, animals, or the environment. Applicators should know what materials are being applied, why they are being applied, and the basic characteristics of the pesticide.

Q. Are any of the pesticides you use dangerous?

Never respond to a customer's concerns about pesticides with a nonchalant "don't worry, it's safe," type of answer. Show a genuine desire to answer the customer's questions. Be as informed as possible and don't give information you are not sure of. If you do not know the answer to a question, don't make up an answer. Advise the customer that you will check with the appropriate specialist and get back with an answer. Follow up as promised.

Q. Are the pesticides you use more hazardous than the products I can purchase for use around my home?

No, most of the pesticides used by certified applicators are available for homeowners to purchase. As a certified applicator you are able to purchase these products in different formulations and concentrations ("the dose makes the poison"). The customer is paying for your experience and knowledge and for the convenience of your service. Advise the customer that there are some restricted use pesticides that can be purchased and applied only by certified applicators and that it is to the applicator's advantage to use the least toxic material at the lowest labeled rate to control the pest.

Q. What should I do to prepare before a pesticide application is made?

If the application is being made outside the home, your customer should be instructed to close all windows and doors. Children's toys, pet items, sports equipment, laundry and other similar items should be removed from the area that is to be treated. Lawn furniture should be covered or rinsed off with water after the application. Barbecues must be kept closed or covered and all cooking utensils removed.

Q. How can I minimize my exposure to the pesticides that are being used?

Caution the customer never to stand in or walk through the treated areas during or immediately after a pesticide application. The customer should keep off the treated area until the spray has dried or dusts have settled unless you instruct otherwise. Provide the customer with all directions concerning re-entry times that are stated on the pesticide label.

Q. What about my pets?

Your customers should be informed to follow the same re-entry procedures for pets as is recommended for humans, unless the pesticide label specifies otherwise.

Q. How should I address concerns from my neighbors?

Tell the customer that New York State Law requires commercial applicators to post a sign notifying anyone entering the property that a pesticide application was made. Encourage the customer to give neighbors your business card, which has your NYSDEC Pesticide Applicator Business Registration number, applicator certification identification card number and telephone number printed on it (this can be a very effective marketing tool). Neighbors can call your office directly if they require prior notification or if they have any specific concerns about the pesticides that will be used.

Q. What should I do with the sign that is left in my lawn?

Instruct the customer to remove the sign promptly after a 24-hour time period has elapsed. If the sign is left longer it may raise concerns that are not justified. Signs that are left posted indefinitely get weathered and become difficult to read. People entering the property may not take future visual notification seriously if they continually see a sign posted in the lawn.

Q. What is the cost of your services?

Your IPM program may be more expensive than some conventional chemical spray programs. A closely monitored IPM program requires more time and extensive training on the part of the applicator. The various IPM strategies used by your company will not only help to prevent some pest problems from developing, but also can also reduce or eliminate the use of chemicals in managing pest problems that do arise. In the long run, a good IPM program should pay for itself.



COMPANY POLICY AND MISSION STATEMENT

Good planning should always come before the implementation of an IPM program. Develop and prepare a written company policy and mission statement that is available to your employees and customers. All employees working for your company should have a general understanding of this IPM policy, including staff answering the telephone.

Develop a user-friendly and field-friendly record-keeping system, which can include site maps to record specific locations of pest outbreaks. Evaluate available computer software options. A variety of software programs are now available to help keep track of pesticide applications and access the previous year's information.

Your company's IPM policy should also include an evaluation process to review all components of the program. Communication, customer service, monitoring, decision-making, treatments and record keeping should be evaluated for overall effectiveness. The IPM program should be modified and continually fine-tuned after each evaluation.

RESOURCES FOR THE PEST MANAGER

This resource list is a guide for those who want to increase their personal knowledge, provide education for employees and modify pest control policies. The Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) office in your county offers services that can help you identify and manage pests. There are many fact sheets and publications available that are specific to your region. Your CCE office can also provide you with the names and addresses of professional trade organizations in your area that offer continuing education and recertification credits.

Internet Resources

Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) <http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/ipm.html>

Cornell University's Program on Breast Cancer and Environmental Risk Factors in New York State (BCERF) <http://www.cfe.cornell.edu/bcerf/>

Extension Toxicology Network (EXTOXNET) <http://ace.orst.edu/info/extoxnet/>

Integrated Pest Management in NYS <http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/ipmnet/ny/urban/>

NYS Department of Health <http://www.health.state.ny.us/>

Pesticide Management and Education Program (PMEP) <http://pmep.cce.cornell.edu>

Pesticide Applicator Core Tutorial <http://pmep.cce.cornell.edu/facts-slides-self/core-tutorial/module14/index.html>

Radcliffe's IPM World Textbook <http://ipmworld.umn.edu/>

US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Office of Pesticide Programs (OPP) <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/>

Cornell University Newsletters

Branching Out: An Integrated Pest Management Newsletter for Trees and Shrubs, is published from April through September by the Department of Plant Pathology, 334 Plant Science Building, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853-5908, telephone 607/255-3284

CUTT: Cornell University Turfgrass Times, is published four times per year by the Turfgrass Science Program, 20 Plant Science Building, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853-4203, telephone 607/255-1789

Other Cornell University Publications

Home Lawns: Establishment and Maintenance, 46pp., revised 1994

Pest Management around the Home: Part I, Cultural Methods, 108pp., April 1996



Pest Management around the Home: Part II, Pesticide Recommendations, 88pp., April 1997

Pest Management Recommendations for Commercial Production and Maintenance of Trees and Shrubs, A Cornell Cooperative Extension Publication, revised annually

Pest Management Recommendations for Commercial Turfgrass, A Cornell Cooperative Extension Publication, revised annually

Cornell Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet

Clark, S. and T. Kowalsick. revised January 1992. *Growing Degree-Days for Insect Pest Management*, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Suffolk County

Reference Books

Johnson, Warren T. and Howard H. Lyon. 1991. *Insects That Feed on Trees and Shrubs*. 2nd Edition. Cornell University Press. Ithaca, NY. 560pp.

Olkowski, W., S. Daar and H. Olkowski. 1991. *Common Sense Pest Control: Least Toxic Solutions for Your Home, Garden, Pets and Community*. The Tauton Press. Newton, CT. 715pp.

Pesticide Management Education Program, revised January 1995. *Pesticide Applicator Training Manual*; Core manual northeastern regional pesticide coordinators: Cornell University Cooperative Extension, Ithaca, NY

Sinclair, Wayne A., Howard H. Lyon, and Warren T. Johnson. 1987. *Diseases of Trees and Shrubs*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca, NY. 575pp.

Tashiro, Haruo. 1987. *Turfgrass Insects of the United States and Canada*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca, NY.

Uva, Richard H., Joseph C. Neal, and Joseph M. DiTomaso. 1997. *Weeds of the Northeast*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca, NY. 397pp.

For more information concerning the careful use of pesticides and ways to reduce pesticide exposure, see BCERF companion Fact Sheet #31, *Integrated Pest Management Around the Home and Garden*, November 1999.

Note: a number of these publications may contain pest management recommendations that may not be legal in New York State. Furthermore, pesticides that are recommended in these publications may not be registered in New York. Please contact your regional NYS Department of Environmental Conservation office to determine if these recommendations and pesticides are legal.

Sources of Reference Materials Used in the Preparation of this Fact Sheet

Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA), Integrated Pest Management Fundamentals of Sustainable Agriculture <http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/ipm.html>

Cornell University's Program on Breast Cancer and Environmental Risk Factors in New York State, BCERF Fact Sheet #4, *Reducing Pesticide Exposure in the Home and Garden: Alternatives and Proper Legal Use Resource Sheet*, Revised, October 1999

Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Circular 1149, February 1995

Higley, Leon G., University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Peterson Robert K.D. DowElanco and University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Environmental Risk and Pest Management <http://ipmworld.umn.edu/chapters/higley.htm>



New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, *Article 33, Title 10 of the Environmental Conservation Law*, 21, June 1997

Ohio State University, The Public and Pesticides: Exploring the Interface <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~plantdoc/pubpest/index.html>

Whitford, F., Martin, A., Purdue Pesticide Programs and Berry, C., Extension Educator, Agriculture and Natural Resources, *Pesticides and the Balancing Act*, PP-33, January 1994

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