

## **Schools Refining Control Of Pests**

By David Bauerlein, *The Times-Union* - Fla.

Sept 3, 2007 - With miles of walls and thousands of meals served daily - not to mention countless cupcake parties - schools have always been a battleground for pest control.

But in recent years, schools have faced calls to reduce their use of pesticides, particularly in light of environmental reports that say small children are vulnerable with the poisonous ingredients that kill bugs.

When pesticide is sprayed onto baseboards, children can get the poisonous residue on them when they touch the boards, or they might breathe in contaminated dust particles, according to the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

The Duval County School Board is prepared to join other school districts that have changed their pest-control tactics by making pesticides a last resort, rather than routinely spraying baseboards. The board will vote Tuesday on a \$195,000 annual contract with Terminix for a program called integrated pest management.

Other school districts have used the program to cut their pesticide use in half, according to UF. Officials with the Clay County and Nassau County school districts said they have used integrated pest management since the late 1990s. St. Johns County administrators said they would check to see what kind of program the district uses, but they did not reply to phone calls Friday.

Homeowners also have been gravitating toward reduced-pesticide treatments, according to local companies.

"It's the sustainable approach to the environment," said Linda Prentice, technical director for Bug Out Service and regional director of the Florida Pest Management Association. Frances Hanson, owner of Bug Pro Florida in Jacksonville, compared integrated pest management to a doctor prescribing a prescription.

"You don't walk into the doctor's office and say, 'I want a shot of this and a shot of that and a shot of that,' " she said.

Just as a doctor first does a health checkup, pest control companies will inspect the building and make a checklist of problems, such as messy food areas and openings in walls and windows. The idea is to first correct the conditions that attract pests, she said. The pest control company will still "prescribe" pesticides if needed, but use treatments that are less poisonous than the traditional sprayed chemicals, she said.

At first, customers might spend more by sealing cracks in walls and windows, said Pam Mattis, an extension agent for Duval County. She said if bugs still are a problem, the next step is child-proof baits that are a "gourmet meal" for bugs, but also contain poison that kills them.

Thirty-three states currently require schools to use integrated pest management. Florida isn't among those states, leaving the decision to districts.

James Hendrix, director of facilities maintenance for Duval County schools, said the district will try integrated pest management for a year and see how effective it is.

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