

Survey shows many child care centers use pesticides to control pests

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A survey of 637 licensed child care centers conducted by a UC Berkeley researcher for the California Department of Pesticide Regulation found that many of the centers have used pesticide spays and foggers that can potentially expose children and staff to residues.

Ninety percent of California child care centers that responded to a survey on pest problems and pesticide use reported at least one indoor or outdoor pest problem, according to a report released today by the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR). Ants were cited as the No. 1 problem both inside and outside the facilities.

“We wanted a snapshot of pest problems and [pest management](#) practices at child care centers after the Healthy Schools Act extension took effect in January 2007,” DPR Director Mary-Ann Warmerdam explained. “The survey showed that pest problems and pesticide use are common. In response to the results, we are tailoring our educational efforts to inform child care center groups and pest control professionals about their responsibilities under the law. ”

The act requires DPR to collect information about pesticide use and pest management in child care centers and then develop programs that encourage these facilities to voluntarily adopt integrated pest management (IPM) practices. The law has no provision for enforcement.

IPM is a strategy to prevent and treat pest problems using a combination of prevention, monitoring, record keeping and control methods such as

eliminating food sources and sealing cracks and crevices in buildings where pests can enter. Chemical controls that pose the least possible hazard to human health and the environment are used only after careful monitoring and when non-chemical methods have failed. The use of pesticides contained in baits, gels or traps are exempt from the law.

The survey found that many of the child care centers that responded are using pesticide sprays and foggers that can potentially expose children and staff to residues on surfaces and in the air, and that many are not complying with notification requirements. It also found that although most centers were not familiar with the phrase “IPM,” many seem to understand the concepts and are using IPM methods.

A total of 637 licensed child care centers responded to the survey conducted for DPR by the Center for Children’s Environmental Health Research at the University of California, Berkeley, School of Public Health. The survey questionnaire was mailed to 2,000 randomly selected child care centers out of approximately 12,000 licensed centers in California.

Lead author Asa Bradman, Ph.D., said, “Our findings are consistent with surveys conducted in other parts of the country. The key to successful implementation of IPM is to assure child care providers that it is easy, not time consuming and will not add new costs. Because children are more vulnerable to pesticides than adults, this program will help further the public health goals of DPR.”

Warmerdam noted that educational materials developed by DPR on both the Healthy School Act and IPM in English and Spanish are posted at apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/ . In collaboration with the University of California, San Francisco, School of Nursing, DPR developed an IPM curriculum specifically designed for child care providers that will be available later this summer.

The survey also found:

- After ants, the top inside pests were spiders, head lice, mice/rats and cockroaches. The top outside pests were bees/wasps, spiders, weeds and squirrels/gophers.
- Fifty-five percent of child care facilities reported using [pesticides](#) to control pests, with 47 percent reporting the use of sprays or foggers.
- Eight percent reported using only pesticide application methods exempt from the Healthy Schools Act such as self-contained bait stations, most commonly for rodents and cockroaches.
- Frequency of pesticide applications varied widely. Twenty-nine percent reported pesticide applications once or a few times a year, suggesting spot applications in response to specific problems. As many as one in five centers scheduled pesticide applications on a weekly or monthly basis, a strategy not consistent with IPM because applications are not necessary if no pests are present.
- Eighty-seven percent of child care centers reported that the [child care](#) director or providers as having primary pest management decision-making responsibilities. However, in many cases these responsibilities were shared with multiple people, indicating that educational outreach is most effective if it targets a broad audience.

The survey is posted at: apps.cdpr.ca.gov/schoolipm/child_care/child_care_pest_mgt_childcare.pdf .

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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