

# MANAGING PESTS AND PESTICIDES IN YOUR OFFICE



Pests can pose serious risks to the health of your employees and the public. They can also disrupt your business operations and compromise the safety of a property. Whether your office is in a converted house or a high-rise tower, a surprising number of pests can find their way inside. When pests appear you may be tempted to bring in a pest control company to spray. However, there are safer and more effective options than spraying pesticides indoors.

This fact sheet describes how to prevent pest infestations, how to protect employees and the public from pesticides by using safer alternatives, and how to use pesticides safely if they must be used.

## PREVENT AND TREAT PEST INFESTATIONS AND KEEP CUSTOMERS AND WORKERS SAFE

The sooner you address a pest or sanitation issue, the easier it is to avoid a serious pest infestation. If you need an expert to help you control pests, hire a licensed Pest Control Company (PCC) certified in integrated pest management (IPM). IPM is a way of managing pests with the least possible hazard to people and the environment. IPM practices employ a team effort among employees, building management, and PCCs.

## USE INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT

- Exclude pests from the building by modifying indoor and outdoor areas to reduce pest habitats; for example, have maintenance workers plug holes and caulk cracks to keep pests out of the building.
- Prevent conditions that attract pests by quickly addressing spills, areas that need cleaning, and plumbing leaks.
- Deny pests food, water, and shelter using best sanitation practices such as lining garbage cans with plastic liners, emptying cans nightly, and requiring employees to follow sanitation and storage procedures.
- Identify specific pests that have infested your building including insects and rodents such as ants, fruit flies, gnats, cockroaches, rats, and mice.
- Use solutions other than pesticides first; for example, use physical controls, such as sticky traps and strong vacuums, to remove cockroaches instead of using pesticides.
- Use products with the least potential for employee exposure; if pesticides are needed, use gels, baits, and traps. Avoid spraying and fogging.
- Prohibit employees from bringing in their own pesticides, including botanicals, since even botanicals can cause health problems.

## DISCONTINUE ROUTINE SPRAYING

Until recently, routine spraying was thought to insure against insect infestations, and building managers hired PCCs to spray whether or not pests were present. Pest management experts now agree that this approach doesn't work and it creates health and environmental risks. Many PCCs have moved away from routine spraying. Increasingly, PCCs in California are trained and certified to perform IPM services. Hiring them will help ensure that the best practices are used (see Resources).

### OFFICE WORKERS SICK FROM PESTICIDE APPLICATION

*When employees returned to work on a Monday after their office building had been fogged and sprayed with pesticides over the weekend, several of them experienced nausea, vomiting, and headaches. Thinking that they had food poisoning, they stayed in the building instead of going outside for fresh air. As a result, their symptoms worsened, and three workers were sent to the hospital.*

Several factors contributed to the problem:

- The PCC did not use IPM practices and did not identify the pest; this likely led to unnecessary or improper pesticide use.
- The building, poorly ventilated to begin with, was not well ventilated after the treatment.
- No one informed the employees about the application so they delayed leaving the building and seeking medical care.

## IF PESTICIDES MUST BE USED, MAKE SURE THEY ARE USED SAFELY

- If you have employees who apply pesticides, you must assure they are trained in how to apply the pesticides safely and warned about associated hazards (see Resources).
- If you hire a PCC to apply pesticides in your building, the PCC must notify the building owner(s) and tenant(s) about the pesticide being applied, and must provide information on typical symptoms of overexposure and phone numbers for County Health, the Agricultural Commissioner, and the Structural Pest Control Board (see Resources).
- You must provide employees with information about pesticides to which they may be exposed. You can provide the material safety data sheet for the substance or other pertinent information regarding the pesticide(s).
- Employees should be informed of precautions to take, such as removing personal articles and food from desks and offices, before a pesticide application occurs.
- You should have an emergency response plan that tells employees what to do if they become ill from pesticide exposure.

## HELP EMPLOYEES IF THEY BECOME ILL FROM A PESTICIDE EXPOSURE

- If someone becomes seriously ill, call 9-1-1 and provide the name of the pesticide involved.
- In less serious cases, employees should seek medical attention through the workers' compensation medical provider and/or the Poison Control Center should be called (1-800-222-1222). Include as much information as possible about what happened and the chemical(s) used.
- Seriously ill employees should not drive themselves to the doctor.
- Report possible pesticide misuse by calling your County Agricultural Commissioner 1-87PestLine (1-877-378-5463).



California Department of Pesticide Regulation  
[www.cdpr.ca.gov](http://www.cdpr.ca.gov)  
(916) 445-4300

## RESOURCES

### University of California IPM Program

Guides to eliminating a variety of pests, as well as information about how to hire a PCC  
[www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.house.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.house.html)  
[www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74125.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74125.html)

### Certification for Pest Control Companies

PCCs trained and certified in IPM methods:  
EcoWise Certified [www.ecowisecertified.org](http://www.ecowisecertified.org)  
Green Shield Certified [www.greenshieldcertified.org](http://www.greenshieldcertified.org)  
GreenPro Certified [www.certifiedgreenpro.org](http://www.certifiedgreenpro.org)

### Penalty actions against Pest Control Companies

<http://www.pestboard.ca.gov/license.shtml>

### Contracting with Pest Control Companies

Guidance and resources for developing contracts and bid documents for structural IPM services  
<http://www.up3project.org/ipmcontracting.shtml>

### Cal/OSHA requirements to educate workers about chemical hazards in the workplace

[www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5194.html](http://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/5194.html)  
<http://www.dir.ca.gov/title8/3203.html>

### Business and Professions Code requirements for structural Pest Control Companies

<http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/displaycode?section=bpc&group=08001-09000&file=8538>



California Department of Public Health  
Occupational Health Branch  
Occupational Pesticide Illness Prevention Program  
[www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohsep/Pages/Pesticide.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohsep/Pages/Pesticide.aspx)  
(800) 970-6680  
CA Relay Service (hearing/speech impaired): 711