Kids deserve a safe place to learn and grow. But bullies and drugs aren’t the only threats to a safe school. Insects, weeds, and rodents can cause health hazards. The pesticides used to control these pests can be hazardous, too. To ensure that pesticides are used safely, every Texas school district employs integrated pest management.

What is integrated pest management?
Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an approach that provides quality pest control using the least hazardous chemicals and techniques. The method relies on the detailed knowledge of pests to prevent infestations; if prevention fails, the method encourages the use of safe and highly targeted pesticides. IPM can be used by anyone with proper training.

The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service is the only state agency that conducts required training in school IPM.

What are the requirements of school IPM?
To protect children, the Texas Legislature passed a law in the early 1990’s requiring that IPM practices be used to manage pests in and around school facilities. Both the National Research Council and the U.S. Environmental Protection agency have since endorsed the IPM approach for schools because it can deliver superior pest control with less risk of pesticide exposure to children.

Each school board in Texas must adopt an IPM policy that follows all legal requirements for pesticide use. The schools must make their policy available for the public to review. Importantly, each district must designate an IPM Coordinator who ensures compliance with the IPM policy.

The key duties of an IPM Coordinator include the following:
- Receiving six hours of training at the time of appointment and once every three years thereafter
- Approving use of higher-risk pesticides on school property
- Keeping written justification of higher-risk pesticide use on file for periodic inspection by the Texas Department of Agriculture
- Answering parents’ questions about pest management at their child’s school
- Educating school staff about IPM
- Inspecting school facilities for conditions that encourage pest infestations
School IPM regulations spell out how pesticides must be applied. For example:

- Texas school districts are free to use any labeled pesticide deemed necessary, but lower-risk pesticide use is encouraged.
- Anyone applying pesticides on school grounds must hold a valid pesticide applicator’s license.
- Building occupants must be notified of any treatments two days in advance.
- Treatments must occur only when no children are present.

Additional regulations vary according to the type of pesticide used:

- **Green Category pesticides** carry the least potential hazard to people and the environment. These include inorganic pesticides such as boric acid or silica gel, insect growth regulators, baits in tamper-resistant containers, microbe-based insecticides, pesticide oils and soaps, and botanical insecticides.
- **Yellow Category pesticides** are those that carry the word CAUTION. Most herbicides fall into this category.
- **Red Category pesticides** are those that carry the word WARNING or DANGER. For at least eight hours after the application of Red Category products and four hours after Yellow Category products, children must be kept away from the treated area. During these hours, the treated area must be clearly marked. Yellow and Red Category products can be used only if justified and must be approved in writing by both a certified applicator and the district’s IPM coordinator.

**What are the benefits of school IPM?**

Many schools adopting IPM are likely to reduce their long-term pest control costs and improve pest control. In a 2006 survey of school IPM coordinators, 53% indicated that the IPM requirements had reduced the long-term cost of pest management; 75% felt that the requirements had resulted in more effective pest control. The costs incurred by schools for licensing and training are minimal, averaging about $50 to $100 per year.

According to the 2006 report Greening America’s School: Costs and Benefits, green-building practices yield greater staff productivity, improved student and staff attendance, and savings of around $70 per square foot in energy costs. Incorporating IPM into green schools is a natural fit.

In most states, school districts receive funding from the state based on attendance rates. At the Northeast Independent School District in San Antonio, a 1% increase in average daily attendance is worth $3.4 million to the school district. The district’s asthma reduction program has earned the district millions of dollars each year.

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