

Maintaining SAFE SCHOOLS

VOLUME 16, ISSUE 6

JUNE 2010

Zero in on hot spots that hide pests

Once you learn how bugs hitchhike into your schools, you can flag the unwitting hosts and put a stop to those free rides. Instead of merely looking for the pests, it's important to know how they may be surreptitiously arriving on the scene so you can intervene.

Key points

- Pests can hitchhike into your school.
- Check loading docks, student lockers and activity fields.
- Establish routines for inspection, cleaning, eradication. ■

Pests are attracted to school buildings by security lights, large steel roofs that provide shelter, nooks and crannies that provide hiding spots, and extended periods of human inactivity during the weekends and the summer months. Pests usually find that schools can offer all the comforts

they're looking for in a home. For example, playgrounds and athletic fields are rich with mulch, and student lockers are often ample hunting grounds for lunch.

A loose beverage cap is all it takes for a thirsty pest to take up lodging in a student locker, said Frank Meek, a board certified entomologist, international technical and training director at Orkin in Atlanta.

While some pests may be local, many infestations are delivered to your door by vendors. Students may also bring cockroaches and bed bugs to school in book bags and packed lunches.

"Prevention is absolutely the best cure for all pest problems," Meek said. While most pests are more an annoyance than a health problem, cockroaches and mice carry and transmit diseases and can contaminate food, Meek said.

Meek shared the following tips to help you prevent pest infestations:

1. The food service loading dock is a prime pest entry point. Develop pest prevention protocol at the delivery receiving door, or pests can spread to other parts of the school. Inspect food at the receiving dock.

Check to ensure that packages are sealed off from pests

before stocking shelves. Look for small holes in packaging.

Don't bring a whole pallet of goods directly into a storage area. Instead, break it down at the loading dock. Carry packages inside only after inspecting the bundle for pests. For example, a pallet could be hiding a pregnant mouse or rat.

Order food in limited quantities as you use it rather than storing large amounts in advance. Insects can destroy food in the pantry while it's waiting to be used.

Don't leave receiving doors standing open.

2. Student lockers can harbor pests brought from home.

Develop a system for routinely opening and cleaning out lockers.

Notify students when lockers will be opened for inspection by pest control experts and cleaned. A good time is when students are out of school for semester breaks.

Extend this protocol to teachers' storage closets.

3. Mulch transferred to athletic fields, playgrounds, activity areas can hide pests.

At elementary school playgrounds, some pests may injure students. Pests such as fire ants, bees, wasps and scorpions can bite or sting students.

Use rubberized mulch instead of natural mulch. Rubberized mulch allows water to flow through and reduces the likelihood that pests will interfere with student activities.

Remain alert for nests of biting insects; prevent them from establishing a colony. Have the nests destroyed.

At athletic fields, pay particular attention to areas near concession stands and at the edge of playing fields where rodents, flies and cockroaches typically congregate. ■

Check for summer pests

Pests that have been inactive in winter build colonies in spring and summer, said Frank Meek, an Atlanta-based Orkin entomologist. They expand in numbers and collect food. Summer is a good time to work with your pest manager to eradicate pests before a new school year starts, Meek said, so you avoid an embarrassing or even harmful pest infestation. ■