

## Integrated pest management in Newton

By Ed Cunningham/ Special To The Tab

Wednesday, July 5, 2006

Prodded and guided by the Green Decade Coalition's Committee for Alternatives to Pesticides (GreenCAP), the city of Newton, in September 1997, became the first municipality in the state to adopt an Integrated Pest Management policy. What happened here in the mid 1990s is an example of how government should work: a small grassroots group of concerned citizens saw a need and was able to affect a municipality's policy and direction. They succeeded, not only because of their vision and dedicated effort, but because IPM is common sense, backed by science, logic, and economics.

This article looks at how IPM came to Newton, what the city's IPM policy is, and what has been accomplished under that policy. It concludes that work remains to be done and that there is still plenty of room for concerned citizens to follow the lead of our IPM pioneers.

GreenCAP was formed in 1994 by Newton residents Maeve Ward and Ellie Goldberg. The nascent group worked to reduce the use of toxins for weed and insect control in the city and in 1996 received a grant from the Toxins Use Reduction Institute at UMASS Lowell. The grant established a partnership among four Newton groups - the Conservation Commission, the Conservators, the Parks and Recreation Department and GreenCAP - to promote pollution prevention policies such as IPM. A task force began work on IPM guidelines for the city's grounds and buildings, GreenCAP's education and outreach projects continued, and a year later Mayor Concannon announced the city's IPM Policy.

It became city policy to eliminate the use of pesticides except as a last resort and to prevent the contamination of buildings, soil, air, and water. The policy also dictated that IPM principles and practices be followed in all work done to city grounds and buildings, whether performed by city employees or outside contractors. An IPM Advisory Committee was formed to coordinate the work of city departments responsible for buildings and grounds regarding the prevention or elimination of pests. Chaired by Doug Dickson since its inception, it consists of representatives of the Departments of Health, Public Buildings, Parks and Recreation, and Public Schools and of community organizations such as the Green Decade Coalition.

Under the direction of the committee, maintenance plans describing how to monitor, document, and handle pest populations were written for all city schools and grounds. Guidelines written for the city's playing fields set mowing heights, watering and aerating policies, and fertilizer characteristics. Environmental Management Teams (EMTs), with PTO and community representation, were established to oversee the plans at each Newton school. Maintenance plans and EMTs are currently being created for all municipal buildings. The committee develops and runs annual staff

training programs. It monitors pest problems and reviews requests or proposals to use pesticides.

In February 2004 the Newton schools won IPM STAR certification after undergoing a rigorous process overseen by Dr. Thomas Green of the IPM Institute of North America, who worked closely on the project with Advisory Committee member Don Rivard, a Waltham-based IPM consultant. The history of pest problems, the condition of buildings and grounds, and the pesticides used in the prior three years were all inspected. Certification requires that IPM policies and plans be in place to guide school administrators and staff in preventing or responding to pest problems.

As this award attests, there have been IPM successes in Newton. But IPM is a continuous process; there will always be more work to do. Reports trickle back to the committee of mowing height standards not being followed, of spraying taking place when it is not a last resort, of vent systems being blocked resulting in temperature control and air quality problems, of cleaning guidelines not being followed, resulting in pest infestation. Plans and training which should prevent these occurrences are in place, but vigilance and follow-up are constantly needed.

Vital to the success of the IPM plans in the schools are the EMTs. An EPA document, "IPM for Schools," states that "Successful IPM programs in schools have come from concerned parents." Carol Bock, IPM Advisory Committee member and Newton School Department Director of Capital Planning and Operations, agrees: "The schools with very active and successful EMTs are the schools where the parents are very involved." As a parent, you can help make IPM work in your children's schools.

The more people read about IPM, the more they realize that it should be mainstream thought and practice. Successful IPM not only makes our buildings and landscapes safer and healthier, it saves money. We should follow it in our own homes and yards as well. Like the IPM pioneers in Newton, you can make a difference. Learn more about IPM. Put it into practice.

*Ed Cunningham is the Green Decade Coalition representative to the Newton IPM Advisory Committee.*

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