



# Bringing Integrated Pest Management to California Public Schools

## OVERVIEW

The Healthy Schools Act mandated “least-toxic” pest management methods at pesticide use in California public schools. A great first step – but how do schools with limited time and money become pesticide and pest management experts? Since the bill’s enactment in 2001, both UC Cooperative Extension (UCCE) and the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) have been working with school districts in California to provide information about integrated pest management (IPM) inside buildings and for outdoor areas on school grounds.

The strategies employed in an outdoor IPM program include modifying horticultural practices, such as adjusting mowing heights and managing irrigation appropriately. These practices can reduce the amount of pesticides used on school grounds to help schools to provide a safer and healthier environment for students, teachers, and staff.

## THE RESEARCH

DPR has coordinated numerous workshops for school districts covering general landscape and building IPM topics. However, attendees requested more detailed training about turf IPM for special areas like playgrounds and sports fields. DPR called on the experts at UCCE to help.

Working closely with DPR, UCCE advisors and specialists conducted hands-on training for school landscape staff throughout California. At each workshop, school staff were provided UCCE resources to assist them in implementing IPM at their schools. Trainers helped the participants interpret the results of their soil tests, discussed identification and management of weeds and other pests, and conducted irrigation evaluations. Participants got their hands dirty at school fields: measuring irrigation output, sampling soil, and identifying weeds.

## THE POLICY IMPACT

Seventy-five public school staff members across the state went back to their districts equipped to use fewer pesticides than before. The trainees recognized that many turf problems could be ameliorated through appropriate turf culture such as managing irrigation, mowing, and fertilization rather than the use of pesticides. Additionally, by demonstrating how to evaluate and improve irrigation systems, the trainees also learned about the impact of appropriately managing water to avoid runoff and improve water quality. The program was such a success that over the past two years, it has expanded to include four additional sites (Chico, Vista, Santa Maria, and Fremont), with continued DPR partnership.

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## LESSONS LEARNED

Participants said they appreciated the applied aspects of the training, especially when discussing solutions outside on the fields. “We also engaged school facility managers to show the participants what they have done to manage turf pests and improve their irrigation systems,” said Cheryl Wilen, the UCCE integrated pest management advisor and endemic and invasive pests and diseases strategic initiative leader. “This combination of academic expertise and real-world, peer-to-peer experiences made it easier for the participants to understand how they can improve their program.”

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