



## EVALUATING YOUR BUILDING'S PEST CONTROL PROGRAM

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Since 1996, pest control in the federal sector is required to be implemented as a process called Integrated Pest Management (IPM), defined as “a sustainable approach to managing pests by combining biological, cultural, physical, and chemical tools in a way that minimizes economic, health, and environmental risks” (7 USC 136r-1).

The statute does not provide further details, but there is general agreement as to how IPM differs from the conventional pest control approach that still exists in many public buildings. Conventional pest control is almost totally reactive and based on repeatedly killing insects and rodents without attempting to understand or fix the underlying reasons for the problem. Service typically consists of little more than the scheduled application of pesticides. IPM may also use pesticides for short-term corrective actions, but selects products that are far more judicious and incisive than the old-fashioned exterminator’s spray. It also has a strong preventive mindset that focuses on reducing sources of pest shelter, food, and access (termed “conducive conditions” for infestations) on a long-term basis. IPM service delivery requires much more expertise than conventional pest control, so it is not surprising that it typically results in much more effective and sustainable control with significantly reduced risks.

However, it is one thing for a non-specialist to understand broad pest control concepts and quite another to critically assess the specific components of a real life program. Since IPM is not only a more rational way to control pests but also a mandated process in federal facilities, it is desirable for both building managers and occupants to be able to systematically evaluate how their own control efforts stack up against a set of established IPM performance standards.

The GSA IPM program uses the following criteria when assessing the pest control operations of public buildings. They are organized into two sets of items, technical and administrative. The technical elements pertain to the front line service performed by the pest control contractor, which often is largely devoted to corrective actions that give immediate relief for existing pest problems. (Ideally, these existing problems should diminish over time and the contractor’s service becomes increasingly devoted to inspection.) The administrative elements pertain to how the program is set up and coordinated by the property-managing agency. This includes the vital implementation of long-term, preventive actions that target the causes of the problems.

Your pest control program can be considered as IPM if these basic standards are met:

### **TECHNICAL STANDARDS FOR IPM**

- The contractor's inspections for insect pests are often aided by sticky traps.
- The contractor provides detailed, site-specific recommendations for structural and procedural modifications to decrease conducive conditions for pest infestation and improve pest prevention.
- Pesticides are never applied by schedule. The contractor uses these chemicals only when inspection confirms that pests are present and cannot be efficiently suppressed with nonchemical means.
- The credo for applying pesticides is "*restraint and precision.*"
- Sprayed insecticides are never routinely applied indoors. They are used only when control for a specific pest cannot be achieved in any other way.
- As a general rule, insecticides applied indoors for cockroach and ant control are bait formulations.
- As a general rule, control of flying insects indoors is accomplished by various types of traps.
- As a general rule, control of rodents indoors is accomplished by various types of traps. Rodenticide is used indoors only in extreme circumstances.
- As a general rule, the technical elements of service delivery to "sensitive" facilities (e.g. child care, health care, food service) are essentially identical to those used in any other part of the building.

### **ADMINISTRATIVE STANDARDS FOR IPM**

- All on-site contractor personnel are Certified Pesticide Applicators, which verifies a minimum acceptable level of expertise. Copies of these certificates are readily available in the agency's contract file. No other personnel in the facility are permitted to bring pesticides onto the premises or to apply them.
- Copies of the labels and material safety data sheets for every pesticide used in the facility are readily available to onsite management personnel.

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- The contractor makes scheduled service visits. Frequency of these visits is sufficient to effectively suppress pest problems so that management and most tenants are satisfied with the level of control. Service visits ideally consist of responding to specific occupant requests followed by routine inspections.
- In a typical public building, the first part of a scheduled service visit is guided by a centralized service call system in which building occupants phone in pest control requests that are logged on a work order document. Client reporting is therefore an important pest surveillance method.
- If there is time remaining after all occupant service requests are answered, the contractor inspects areas at particular risk for pest infestation. These tend to be sites where food or waste are concentrated, are warmer or moister than typical office space, or where pests find it easy to enter the building.
- In addition to the pest control contract, which deals primarily with inspection and corrective issues, the overall pest control effort includes improvements in sanitation and exclusion throughout the facility where conducive conditions for pest infestation have been identified. Programs whose procedures often have a strong impact on pest control include structural maintenance, cleaning and waste management, food service, landscape, and child care.

**AT A MINIMUM, ASK THESE QUESTIONS:**

- **Are pests or evidence of pests frequently encountered?**
- **Are there obvious conducive conditions for pests?**
- **Is insecticide being routinely sprayed indoors? Are there obvious indoor rodenticide placements?**
- **Is pest control service limited to pesticide application, with little or no inspection of potential trouble spots?**
- **Are many occupants dissatisfied with the pest control service?**

**If the answer is “no” to all of the above, your pest control program is successful and conforms to the intent of the IPM mandate.**