Precautionary Pest Management: The San Francisco Experience

Debbie Raphael
Toxics Reduction/Green Building Program Manager
(415) 355-3711  debbie.raphael@sfgov.org
www.sfenvironment.org
People will follow those who lead – if you don’t have a vision, all you have is the fight. (Bruce Vincent, Vincent Logging, Libby Montana)

• **IPM born of a fight**
  – Industries who make the pesticides vs. people on the ground using the products vs. citizen groups who oppose the use of those pesticides (*where are the academics?*)

• **Offers a solution**, but in and of itself, IPM may not be the vision
A picture of my children’s vision of their world

- Climate refugees
  - Peak Oil
- Body Burden
- Asthma
- Breast Cancer
Science points us to these problems but proof of cause and effect can be elusive

- Can not afford for uncertainty to become an excuse for paralysis of leadership

- Need for a better decision making process. Governments are seeking ways to make decisions that will counteract this vision of devastation
Precautionary Principle (Vorsorge: “fore caring”)

- No longer sufficient to ask:
  - Is it legal?
  - Is it safe?

- Must also ask:
  - Is it necessary?
The Precautionary Principle places IPM into a larger context. One that is explicit about:

1. Obligation to minimize harm

2. Public Involvement
How do you determine if it’s necessary?

- **Risk** Assessment vs. **Alternatives** Assessment
  
  *(Dr. Mary O’Brien – Making Better Environmental Decisions…..)*

- How much harm is **allowable** vs. How little harm is **possible**?

- **Science**, costs, benefits of all alternatives

- Choose the alternative that minimizes harm
RoundUp: Gardeners and Community ask: Is it necessary?

- **90%** reduction because often it is not necessary
  - Goats, hand weeding, flamers
  - Prevention: mulch, sealing cracks
  - **Acceptance** (lawns as meadows)

- Sometimes RoundUp is the alternative that minimizes harm
  - Median strips
  - Airport runways
  - Invasive weeds in “Natural Areas”
Who determines if it’s Necessary?

• Democracy: include all affected parties early on

• Ultimately it is the elected officials who make the determination

• Let us not fear the dissenters, but allow them to sharpen the debate, push us towards new directions
Dissenters brought IPM to SF

• **Exposure** in the media (1996) – “Parks are for people not pesticides”

• **Elected Officials Respond** – Ban all pesticides by 2000

• **Cooler Heads Prevail** – Ban except for an Approved list

• **Program is put in place** –
  – More than a list
  – IPM Coordinator
Benefits of Precautionary Pest Management (IPM)

• **Reductions:**
  – 90% reduction in RoundUp; 50-70% Reduction overall
  – Elimination of indoor sprays, most toxic pesticides

• **Innovation, Creativity**
  – Many people asking “is it necessary”

• **Improved Morale, Cooperation among agencies**
  – Technical Advisory Committee, Training, Awards

• **Trust, Ability to use pesticides when necessary**
  – Transparent decision making, Approved List, Public Accountability
“The world is run by those who show up” (Bruce Vincent)

• Tremendous experience in the room
• Applaud ourselves for how far we have come, and then the real work begins
• We KNOW what IPM means (who cares about getting all the words in a definition just right)
• Broaden our horizon, find partners in some unexpected places
Where must we show up?

• Make precautionary principle of IPM readily accessible to the general public
  – Certification:
    • 3rd party certified, can not be industry based


• **Indoor Air Quality** – worker productivity/disability access
Where must we show up?

• Market forces are telling us – don’t be afraid to embrace a precautionary approach.
  – Ex. Sam’s Club offering organic produce
IPM offers a powerful model for precautionary thinking.

- I invite all of you experts in IPM to create a world where we do not fear our critics but work together towards a common vision, a world shaped by “fore caring”.
So that when we ask:

• **Is it legal?**
  – Confident our laws are protective of all life

• **Is it safe?**
  – Sufficient data and testing so that we understand how a chemical interacts within organisms and ecosystems

• **Is it necessary?**
  – Affected communities are at the table, our elected officials are empowered to examine all the alternatives, and to minimize harm