

Cockroaches in Your School – You Rarely Find Just One

December 13, 2016

Thank you for attending the *Cockroaches In Your School – You Rarely Find Just One* webinar broadcast on December 13, 2016, a part of the [School IPM Webinar series](#) hosted by EPA's Center of Expertise for School IPM.

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Speakers

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Questions and Answers

The questions below were posed by the webinar participants. The responses may have been refined for clarification or to include additional resources.

1. How do we treat for German cockroaches in wheelchairs and keep them from spreading to other students?

(Ms. Hurley) You may need to work with your occupational health therapy team. A wheelchair, especially if a student is bound to it, can actually have pests living in it. Have the teacher or school nurse work with occupational health therapist to find out what is going on at the student's home. Focus on identifying and removing the source of the food, harborage, and other things the cockroach needs to survive. We worked with a district to place gel baits in a student's wheelchair. That way, the cockroaches in the home were actually exposed to the bait.

2. Do you have suggestions on how to keep roaches out of classroom computers? And why are they attracted to computers in the first place?

(Dr. Koehler) There are several reasons why a cockroach would be attracted to electronics, like computers. One would be the heat that electronics generate. A classroom may be cool so the roaches would seek out warmer places in order to survive.

As far as keeping the roaches out, baiting would be a very good approach. Baiting around the computer, in places where the students and staff could not access, would be a great way to go. Perhaps removing the computer housing, and placing the baits where they wouldn't create any danger of shorting out the computers. You should also consider whether the roaches are there because kids are snacking while using the computers. It would be best to restrict student access to food and drink while they are working on the computers.

3. Can finding a cockroach on a sticky board during a health department inspection be problematic?

(Mr. Koebel) A colleague, in charge of the New York City schools, had the same problem. The health department would do a kitchen inspection, find a cockroach on a sticky board, and immediately write up the kitchen staff. He would immediately take the inspector aside and say, "You need to understand what we are doing. The fact that we see only one roach means that we are winning the battle - we are on top of our pest control. Let me show you all of the other boards that are empty."

We are being proactive - looking for pest issues and taking care of things.” This is a teachable moment. You could say, “Let’s look around here. Do you see anything? Look at the pipes, do you see anything there? See how we have filled in the gaps around them here.” The school manager took the sanitarian around the school to show him their successful pest management program. But, there will be someone who will say you have a problem. Just have the information to show that you do not have a problem and what you are doing to keep it that way.

4. Do you have resources for the floor drain devices?

(Dr. Koehler) You can find a lot of information on the web by searching for “green drain.” As Ms. Hurley mentioned, there are alternatives to the device I showed - we just happen to have had experience with that one.

5. Do you advise people to discard corrugated boxes?

Cardboard boxes are not something that you want to leave lying around in piles. If you are not using the cardboard, you need to remove it. If you can unpack cans or other items from boxes and put them on shelves in a kitchen and storeroom, you will be much better off discarding the boxes. Removing the boxes takes away a food source for cockroaches. When you dispose of corrugated cardboard boxes, get together with your waste management company to have them recycled.

6. We have tried different pesticides to kill roaches and they still come back. Is it possible that cleaning is not being done correctly?

(Ms. Hurley) It could be a number of things. We found in one school that it wasn’t just the cleaning but also where the bait applications were being made. So many people do not give that simple task due consideration. Ask yourself, “Am I putting the bait in a place that the cockroach is going to go to? Or am I putting it in a place that is convenient for me because I do not want get down into that crack or hole.”

We need to think like a cockroach. They are not going to come out, away from their harborage and preferred food source. In another school with cockroaches in the dishwashing machine, the technician put the cockroach bait station across a doorway across from the dishwasher. The cockroaches were not going to leave the dishwashing machine to go get the bait. To properly place the bait, the technician should have opened the machine and put the bait on a piece of cardboard or sticky card inside the machine.

Again, it is not always product. It may be the human behavior behind the product placement. So again, think like a roach. “If I am given a choice between a salad and a steak, I am going to choose the steak.” If the cockroach is given a choice between a bait or a French fry, it is going to go for the French fry.

7. How do we identify the best sealants to keep roaches out and what do we look for in a sealant?

(Ms. Hurley) The proper sealant depends on what you are trying to seal. For example, use a silicon water-based sealant for stainless steel against tile.

(Mr. Koebel) Of course, the surfaces need to be clean before you apply any sealant. You also want to know how much movement are you are going to see in the opening. Are you are dealing with expansion joints in buildings that routinely get caulked on the outside? There is a lot of movement in that case. You also have to be sure that the product you are using has the ability to expand and contract with the movement in the building.

If you go to your supply house, they are going to have urethane caulks, silicon caulks, and a number of other caulk formulations. Read the label. It is going to tell you, “Use on porcelain...Use on wood... or Use on brick.” Get the right one. If you are not sure, ask the folks there what will give you the best adhesion...and get that product.

I have been in a lot of places where they used the wrong sealant. There is nothing worse than trying to do a treatment where the sealant has failed. Remember that the most expensive part of the entire process is your labor. To have someone use the wrong product and then have to pay them a second time to scrape it all out, and properly apply a different product, is not saving money. So do a little research, and get the right product.

8. We have Oriental cockroaches in our water (meter) boxes. What should we do?

(Dr. Koehler) We have had success using baits in these locations. You can use a gel bait or a granular bait that you drop into the water box.

9. What suggestions do you have for addressing treatment at a student's home? Especially when they likely cannot afford to do it themselves?

(Ms. Hurley) That is always a difficult issue. If they are living in managed housing, the management team should be contacted to get the appropriate treatment. It can help to point out that you have a student that has an issue living there. You can then work with the management company to determine who is responsible for treatment.

10. When it comes to roaches or other pests, do trash compactors have advantages to dumpsters?

(Ms. Hurley) A clean, well maintained dumpster is the best. It does not matter if it's a compactor. If the dumpster has holes that have rusted through the bottom letting food spill or seep out, there will be a pest problem. If the dumpster or compactor doesn't have a good lid, you will have pest problems.

11. My pest management contractor says scouting / inspections are not necessary and he will just spray the kitchen every week until the problem is under control. Is this acceptable?

(Ms. Hurley) No, this is not effective pest management. If you do not properly identify the pest and taking corrective actions - like cleaning and sanitation - insecticide treatments will not get rid of the pest problem. It could actually drive the pests farther into the building, or allow them to become resistant to the chemical being used.

You should rewrite your bid specifications to include monthly inspections that are documented and followed-up with monitoring devices. Also specify that action thresholds will be used for common pests and that multiple control tactics will be required. The more specificity you can add to your bid specifications and contracts, the more likely you are to get the services you truly want.

(Mr. Koebel) A weekly spray is not IPM. Pesticides are a tool in your IPM toolbox, but they should not be the only tool. For instance, if you spray every week, but do not control routes of entry and food sources, you will still have a hospitable environment for the pests. Plus, you will have exposed students and staff to additional pest treatments.