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## Urban Integrated Pest Management Training for Retail Store Employees

Kyle Cecil

*University of Illinois Extension, cecilk@mail.aces.uiuc.edu*

George Czapar

*University of Illinois Extension*



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## Urban Integrated Pest Management Training for Retail Store Employees

### Abstract

A pilot training program in pest management and proper pesticide use was initiated in Illinois for retail and garden center employees by University of Illinois Extension. Primary instructors for the workshop included Integrated Pest Management and Horticulture educators. Because retail stores that sell pesticides are an important source of information for the homeowner, one method of transferring integrated pest management (IPM) strategies to the urban audience is to provide specialized training to retail store employees. In general, the current level of employee pest management training in retail stores that sell pesticides appears limited. This audience, however, seems very receptive to increasing the expertise of their employees, with the primary goal of improved customer service.

### Kyle Cecil

Unit Educator, Agriculture & Natural Resources Management  
Galesburg, Illinois  
Internet Address: [cecilk@mail.aces.uiuc.edu](mailto:cecilk@mail.aces.uiuc.edu)

### George Czapar

Extension Educator, Integrated Pest Management  
Springfield, Illinois

University of Illinois Extension

### Introduction

General use pesticides are widely used by homeowners throughout the country. One survey estimated that 85% of all households in the United States had at least one pesticide product in storage, while 63% of all households had one to five products in storage (EPA, 1992).

Lajeunesse et al. (1996) and Sclar et al. (1997) found that the majority of homeowners in their studies purchased pesticides from home/garden centers and used these outlets as information providers for their pest management activities.

Because retail stores that sell pesticides are an important source of information for the homeowner, one method of transferring integrated pest management (IPM) strategies to the urban audience is to provide specialized training to retail store employees. Extension Integrated Pest Management and Horticulture educators could serve as primary instructors for delivery of this type of specialized training.

Czapar et al. (1998) surveyed 656 retail stores in Illinois that sell pesticides to identify educational programs and resources that would be most useful to this audience. Approximately 83% of respondents indicated they would be willing to send employees to a local, educational program on understanding pesticides, safe handling practices, and making pesticide recommendations.

Based on these results, a pilot training programs in pest management and proper pesticide use was initiated in Illinois for retail and garden center employees.

### Methods

In March, 1998, a survey was mailed to 10 local retailers of lawn and garden supplies in Knox County, Illinois. Survey recipients were asked to identify the types of pest management questions

they commonly encounter and the educational topics they would find most useful.

Six of the retailers completed the assessment, and their responses were used to develop a program. The 4-hour program included insect, weed, and disease management; pesticide safety; and IPM concepts. Insect, weed, and plant disease specimens were used, and safety equipment was demonstrated.

Fourteen individuals participated in the training session, including 10 retail store employees, three homeowners, and one Master Gardener volunteer. At the end of the training, participants were asked to evaluate the program on a one to five scale (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
Impact Evaluation of Training Session

|   | <b>Question</b>  | <b>Response (Avg.)</b> |
|---|--|------------------------|
| 1 | Was the program worthwhile by including general knowledge in pest management and pesticide safety? | 4.6                    |
| 2 | Did the program improve your understanding of pesticide use and safety?                            | 4.5                    |
| 3 | Do you feel you improved your ability to apply integrated pest management principles?              | 4.4                    |

Scale: 1 - no, not at all . . . 5 - yes, significantly

Participants were also asked to list practice changes that they would implement as a result of the workshop. Specific practice changes included recommendation of integrated pest management alternatives to clientele as a primary control method and chemical control of pests as secondary control measures. Participants also indicated that they would emphasize more personal safety to clientele purchasing pesticide products from their store.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In general, the current level of employee pest management training in retail stores that sell pesticides appears limited (Czapar et al., 1998). This audience, however, seems very receptive to increasing the expertise of their employees, with the primary goal of improved customer service as the desired outcome.

It seems likely that retail store employees will attend Extension programs if they address specific pest management topics and provide additional resources and educational materials. More work is needed to understand the long-term impacts of using a "train-the-trainer" approach to transfer IPM information from the retailer to the homeowner.

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