



From the Director

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Pesticide Pollution must be curbed in urban areas, too

By Mary-Ann Warmerdam

Too many Californians associate pesticide use only with large-scale agricultural operations. In reality, pesticide sales are split about evenly between agricultural and non-agricultural products, including home and garden pesticides and institutional products like chlorine used to sanitize drinking water.

A small, but growing number of consumers are buying organic produce because of concern about the effect of pesticides on their health and the environment. There is much less awareness that use of pesticides to kill ants and other pests in our own homes and gardens can harm the environment.

For example, surface water monitoring data collected for the state's regional water quality control boards and monitoring by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) continue to detect pesticides in waterways in both agricultural and urban settings at levels toxic to some small aquatic organisms.

DPR is monitoring urban-area waterways at 18 sites in California, including Dublin in Alameda County. Pesticides are detected in more than 95 percent of the water samples. Fifty percent contain at least five pesticides.

In recent years, DPR has encouraged urban communities to inform their residents that they may be contributing to water pollution through home and garden pesticide use. Through grants and recognition, we promote integrated pest management (IPM), a combination of natural and preventive strategies that focus on long-term pest prevention and pose a low risk to people, pets and the environment. Pesticides should be used as a last resort and selected to remove only the target pest.

This summer, DPR awarded grants to the city of San José and the Bay Area Stormwater Management Agencies Association to improve water quality by reducing pesticide use in yards and gardens. San José received \$200,000 for a pesticide-free park and demonstration gardens at Guadalupe River Park and the association was awarded \$170,000 for the IPM Advocates for Retail Stores project. These grants are subsidized with fees on pesticide sales.

Instead of controlling pests in Guadalupe River Park's Courtyard Gardens with pesticides, San José will develop a weed-prevention test area, squirrel control program and two demonstration gardens that will host workshops and training demonstrations. Visitors will be encouraged to replace lawns with predominantly sustainable landscapes

to reduce pesticide applications, provide native habitat for birds and beneficial insects and reduce energy and water use.

The association's project is designed to reduce runoff into local waterways of pesticides applied in homes and gardens by educating retail store employees and their customers. The project will build on and expand the Our Water, Our World program (ourwaterourworld.org), which promotes IPM alternatives to popular consumer pesticide products.

DPR has also recognized the Bay Area's leadership in reducing pesticide use with IPM Innovator Awards. Earlier this year, San José was honored for using goats and sheep for weed control on parklands; use of barn owl and bat boxes in city parks and community gardens to control pests and removing cocoons of the destructive tussock moth by power washing, followed by releases of stingless parasitic wasps.

In 2009, the Santa Clara Valley Urban Runoff Pollution Prevention Program was honored for reducing urban runoff pollution by educating pesticide users about the effect of pesticides on water quality and how they can prevent pollution.

Pestec, a groundbreaking family-owned business that provides IPM services to residential homes, public agencies and businesses throughout the Bay Area, also received an award last year. Its "green" practices include advocating good landscaping practices, irrigation reduction and effective baiting strategies for infestations of Argentine ants.

Kudos Bay Area! Your leadership role will help inform residents about effective pest-control options that also protect the environment.

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