

# KEEP PESTS AND PESTICIDES OUT OF YOUR OFFICE!



Whether your office is in a converted house or a high-rise tower, a surprising number of pests find their way inside. Many of us have seen ants marching into the break room or gnats hovering around indoor plants—or heard a co-worker complaining about itchy bites. When pests invade, you may be tempted to spray them yourself or demand that your building manager bring in a pest control company to spray, but there are safer and more effective options than spraying pesticides indoors.

THIS FACT SHEET describes how and why pests get into buildings, how to prevent pest problems without using pesticides, and what to do if you think you've been affected by pesticides in the workplace.

## WHY ARE THERE PESTS IN MY BUILDING?

When insect and rodent pests enter buildings, they'll stay if they find food, water, and shelter. Building managers and maintenance crews try to prevent pests from getting in by plugging holes and caulking cracks, but they can't stop you from bringing in cereal infested with beetles or a potted plant that will eventually generate thousands of gnats.

## WHICH PESTS VISIT OFFICE BUILDINGS?

Almost any pest can crawl, fly, or hitchhike into your building.

- **FRUIT FLIES** feed on yeasts present on ripe fruits and vegetables, food scraps, and sugary liquids.
- **FUNGUS GNATS** may buzz around your face and computer screen as you're trying to work. If you notice them, look for the usual culprit—overwatered plants.
- **PANTRY PESTS** include beetles and moths that lay eggs in nuts, cereal, crackers, and even chocolate. They can show up when someone leaves uneaten snacks in a drawer for months and those snacks contain beetle or moth eggs. These insects easily spread to other parts of the building.
- **ANTS** often come indoors to find food during summer and fall when they no longer find food outside. Rain or irrigation will sometimes drive ants indoors to escape flooded conditions.
- **COCKROACHES** can get into buildings by slipping under doorways or entering through underground parking lots. Most species live outdoors, but you may see a few roaches indoors searching for food and water. If you see roaches, don't spray or use foggers.
- **RATS & MICE** squeeze under doors or into holes. They nest in papers and will eat almost anything, including paper, fabric, and plastic.
- **SPIDERS** are beneficial predators of mosquitoes, gnats, and house flies. Most are harmless. Black widow spiders rarely live inside office buildings, and brown recluse spiders do not live in California.

## PREVENT PESTS FROM INVADING

- Bring ripe fruit home or store in a refrigerator—don't leave fruit on your desk overnight.
- Keep snacks in rigid, sealed containers, not in plastic bags.
- Clean food-soiled dishes, utensils, and surfaces by the end of each day.
- Dispose of food in garbage cans that have plastic liners.
- Ask that garbage cans be emptied each night.
- Reduce clutter in work areas. Store items away from the floor in cabinets, racks, or bins.
- Don't overwater potted plants. Bring plants home if you notice they're infested with gnats.

## GOT PESTS? TELL THE BUILDING MANAGER!

- The sooner you let building management know about pest problems or sanitation issues, the easier it is to correct them. Report spills, plumbing leaks, or areas that need cleaning.
- When reporting a pest, note the evidence you've seen: droppings, damage by the pest, or the pest itself.
- If your building needs an expert to manage pests, ask your building manager to hire a company that does integrated pest management or IPM (see Resources below).

## LEAVE YOUR OWN PESTICIDES AT HOME

Never bring in your own pesticides, even if you think a product is harmless. Even botanical pesticide sprays can cause coughing or eye irritation, and cause or trigger asthma.

### OFFICE WORKERS SICK FROM PESTICIDE APPLICATION

When employees returned to work on a Monday after their office building had been fogged and sprayed with pesticides over the weekend, a number of them experienced symptoms such as nausea, vomiting and headaches. Thinking that they had food poisoning, they stayed in the building instead of going outside for fresh air. As a result, their symptoms worsened, and three workers were sent to the hospital.

Several factors led to this incident. The applicator did not use Integrated Pest Management or IPM (see section on IPM below); for example, he sprayed pesticides, although he hadn't identified a pest beforehand. The building, poorly ventilated to begin with, was not well ventilated after the treatment. And no one informed employees about the application, so they delayed leaving the building and getting medical care.

### YOUR RIGHTS

Your employer should tell you which chemicals, including pesticides, are used in your work area and when they'll be used. Before a pesticide treatment, you should have time to remove personal articles and food from your desk or office. If you are not provided with a material safety data sheet containing information about the chemical, you should ask to see one.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU THINK YOU'RE ILL FROM PESTICIDE EXPOSURE?

- *If you or someone else is seriously ill, call 9-1-1.*
- Notify your employer immediately. Find out the name of the pesticide involved.
- If you decide not to call 9-1-1, seek medical attention through your employer's workers' compensation medical provider or call the Poison Control Center, 1-800-222-1222. Tell them that you may have been exposed to a pesticide at work and include as much information as possible about what happened.
- To report possible pesticide misuse, contact your County Agricultural Commissioner's office by calling the toll-free 1-87PestLine (1-877-378-5463).

### WHAT'S INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT?

IPM is a common-sense approach to managing pests while eliminating or reducing the use of harmful pesticides. IPM programs for office buildings focus on preventing pest problems by excluding pests and getting rid of the food, water, and shelter that pests need to survive.

IPM is a team effort involving people who work in the building, building management, and pest management professionals or PMP. To learn more about IPM and find PMPs who use IPM practices, see the box below.

### RESOURCES

#### University of California IPM Program

[www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.house.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.house.html)  
Guides to all of the pests mentioned above as well as information about how to hire a pest control company:  
[www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74125.html](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74125.html)

**Our Water Our World.** [www.ourwaterourworld.org](http://www.ourwaterourworld.org)  
Fact sheets in English & Spanish on managing pests at home.

#### Certification for Pest Control Companies

Companies trained to use IPM practices:  
EcoWise Certified, [www.ecowisecertified.org](http://www.ecowisecertified.org)  
Green Shield Certified, [www.greenshieldcertified.org](http://www.greenshieldcertified.org)  
Quality GreenPro, [www.certifiedgreenpro.org](http://www.certifiedgreenpro.org)



**California Department of Public Health**  
Occupational Health Branch  
Occupational Pesticide Illness Prevention Program  
[www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohsep/Pages/Pesticide.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/ohsep/Pages/Pesticide.aspx)  
(800) 970-6680 | CA Relay Service (hearing/speech impaired): 711



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