

On April 21, 2001 the Washington State Legislature enacted “Right to Know” legislation mandating all school districts must notify parents and/or guardians in writing before the application of any herbicides and pesticides on school properties. The Bainbridge Island School District (BISD) became the first Washington State school district to institute Integrated Pest Management (IPM). BISD was the model for the passage of this bill and their policy is being used to help other state school districts implement IPM practices.

Parents Maria Mason and Karen Ahern, serving on the state’s Integrated Pest Management in Schools Work Group, were instrumental in the passage of this legislation. Their co-volunteers and committee members Dale Spoor (retired BISD teacher), Jerry McLaughlin (BISD Representative), BISD Grounds Lead-person Bernie Mejia; BISD Facilities Maintenance Foreman Jack Evans; Erika Schreder from the Washington Toxics Coalition; EPA consultant Don Priest also worked on the legislation and BISD IPM proposal. “IPM is an ecologically sound approach to pest control that emphasizes prevention, physical or biological control where possible, and the use of least-toxic chemicals only as a last resort,” says Dale Spoor.

Lemolo resident, Richard Best, BISD Facilities and Operations Manager helped draft and implement the policy “All the studies of pesticides relate to adults. No one knows the effects on a child. That’s why I’m glad about our policy,” Rich said. “I implement the written policy and Jack Evans and Chris Rauch carry it out. I can’t give enough praise to these two men.” Mariah says, “The school district is very active in this effort. They go above and beyond to help us. What’s wonderful about this legislation is BISD is already carrying out notification and signage and we already have a policy.”

Rich said at first people were concerned it would cost the district more for IPM but costs haven’t increased and in some instances money is being saved. “Jack Evans and Chris Rauch are not only carrying out IPM, but Jack has gotten Ace Hardware and True Value on the Island to carry organic products,” Rich said. “We use a mint oil product to get rid of the bees on playground equipment. Once in a while we have to call in an exterminator from Port Orchard who uses organic and least toxic measures,” said Rich. “We always notify parents and the action is taken when kids are away from the school building or grounds.”

Hearty and heartfelt congratulations to all these conscientious, concerned gardeners, workers and volunteers. They’re continuing to give countless hours to make schools a least toxic place for kids (and adults too).

We can use IPM in our own home gardens and yards. We can also let our own school districts know about IPM. The Washington Toxics Coalition can be reached at 206-632-1545. Ask for the publication “What You Can Do About Pesticide Use in Schools.” Kitsap County Master Gardeners practice IPM and want folks to adopt the following motto “Think First---Spray Last!” Visit the WSU Hortsense Website at <http://pep.wsu.edu/hortsense> and the WSU Pesticide Education Program at <http://pep.wsu.edu>. The National Pesticide Telecommunications Network is reached at 1-800-858-7378 or <http://ace.orst.edu/info/nptn>. You can also call the Washington Poison Center at 1-800-732-6985.

When you visit garden and home improvement centers take a walk down the fertilizer and pesticide/herbicide aisles. Take a deep breath. Doesn’t it smell toxic to you? Rich Best pointed out, “The goal of most of these products is to “kill” something.” Maria said, “Beware of inert ingredients, sometimes they’re more toxic than the product itself.” Think very carefully before using these products, better yet, don’t buy any of the products until you thoroughly read every single word printed on the label. Take special notice of the “Warning” and “Hazards” sections. Remember too if a bug or plant is not listed the product will not work on those “unlisted” bugs or plants.

Unfortunately you might need a microscope or magnifying glass to read all that tiny print. Ever wonder why the print is so horribly tiny on those labels? “Caveat Emptor” or “Buyer Beware.” You can also request a MSDS (Materials Safety Data Sheet) from the company manufacturing the product. It’s a federal law. The company has to provide the MSDS within 24 hours. Many stores selling the products have the MSDS on hand. Please read the MSDS before purchasing these products.

It is not my practice to preach to my readers, but I felt you’d want to know and consider the preceding information. A dear gardener I know said, “We are only keepers and caretakers of our gardens.” Let’s each of us do the least harm we can.

Send comments or questions to Peg at gardenmentor@yahoo.com or in care of this newspaper.