

CITY OF BALTIMORE

MAYOR STEPHANIE RAWLINGS-BLAKE



HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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Health Department, EPA Announce Grant for Safe Pest Management for Health Initiative

Innovative strategy to reduce harmful pesticide use and promote healthy alternatives

BALTIMORE, MD (March 30, 2010) – Health Department officials announced a \$250,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to create a new program designed to transform pest management practices and improve health in Baltimore City homes, schools, parks and businesses.

The Safe Pest Management for Health Initiative (SPMH) will reduce community pesticide use while introducing the idea of integrated pest management, a less harmful, more effective and environmentally sensitive approach to eliminating pests. More than 5,450 residents, community partners and government workers will be trained in integrated pest management practices and safe pesticide use.

When fully implemented, the two-year initiative will help improve the homes, schools and workplaces for over 100,000 residents. It's hoped that building-specific action plans decrease the use of toxic aerosol pesticide applications at those sites by 75 percent.

“Many illnesses are associated with pesticide use, including asthma and other respiratory illnesses, birth defects and neurological problems,” said Interim Commissioner Olivia D. Farrow. “By safely reducing pests, this initiative will improve the health, environment and quality of life of Baltimore residents.”

Pests and pesticides are ubiquitous in Baltimore, threatening the health of residents and the environment. Acute and chronic pesticide exposure in humans has been shown to cause poor health outcomes, including cancer, infertility, and neurological damage. Despite extensive use of pesticides, pests remain a significant burden in Baltimore.

The SPMH Initiative started in October. It seeks to educate and empower low-income, at-risk residents and staff in 20 schools, 10 public housing developments, and five day care centers. Homeless shelter and transitional housing staff also will receive IPM trainings.

In addition, the SPMH Initiative will target education and training efforts to the city's growing Latino population and thousands of private residences through existing home visiting. The peer

education and *promotores* strategies will allow BCHD to educate 600 people using trusted peers, neighbors and confidants.

“Hands-on education and empowerment of underserved persons in convenient locations is the lynchpin of the SPMH Initiative,” said Madeleine Shea, deputy commissioner of the department’s Division of Healthy Homes & Communities.

Integrated pest management is a less toxic, more cost-effective and efficient way of managing cockroaches and mice in the indoor urban environment. The strategy involves first identifying and eliminating the conditions that led the pests to enter the building. Preventive measures, such as sealing cracks and properly storing food, are encouraged. If the problem persists, pest control products that cause the least possible hazard to people are employed.

A pilot program conducted last year by the Health Department in one of Baltimore’s public housing developments achieved a 97 percent reduction in cockroach infestation and a 100 percent reduction in aerosol insecticide use.

“Once complete, this initiative will put Baltimore on the road to becoming a national model integrated pest management city,” Farrow said.

For more information about integrated pest management, visit the EPA’s Website at <http://www.epa.gov/> or the Health Department’s site: <http://www.baltimorehealth.org/spmh.html>.

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