

For Immediate Release

**Contact: Jennifer Lombardi
Director of Communications
(916) 446-3316
Cell: (916) 204-1584**

**Choice A Critical Factor In School Health And Safety:
Plant Health Industry and School Districts Respond to Pest Control in Schools**

[Sacramento, CA] One year after implementation of the Healthy Schools Act, school districts throughout California continue to focus on properly addressing pest problems on campus. A recent report, however, incorrectly suggests that schools are doing little to ensure children's safety.

"It is a shame that school districts are being put in the crosshairs of political agendas that attempt to take away every tool necessary to protect children from dangerous pests," said Steve Beckley, president and CEO, California Plant Health Association, Sacramento. "If a school has a pest problem, they should be able to address it in the best and safest way possible. Unfortunately, not everyone agrees with this approach."

A press release on "Learning Curve: Charting Progress on Pesticide Use and the Healthy Schools Act," issued May 2 by the California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG), states that several California school districts "anticipate using... very hazardous pesticide active ingredients." What the report fails to mention are all the safeguards in place that protect children, the benefits of careful pest control product use when necessary, and that these same districts may, under certain circumstances, use federal and state approved pest control products.

"The simple truth is that when a serious pest issue arises, the use of pest control products may be necessary," added Beckley. "In some situations, an organic approach may be better. But there may be problems with rats, wasps and other pests, some of which carry fatal diseases, that necessitate the use of a pest control product. I think most parents would agree that we need to provide school districts with all the tools necessary to address a potentially deadly pest problem." School district officials agree.

"We are responsible for the health and safety of 96,000 students every day. We take that responsibility very seriously," said Richard Van Der Laan, public information officer, Long Beach Unified School District. "We use federal and state approved materials and methods. We never spray when students are present."

The CALPIRG report indicates that several districts will engage in the unnecessary use of "toxic" pest control products at California school campuses. However, one of the active ingredients listed in the report, pyrethrin, is a common, federal and state licensed pest control product found in several lines of Raid

and Black Flag insect products, as well as Hartz and Sergeant's flea and tick control products for cats and dogs.

"Parents throughout the country have these products in a safe location in their home," said Beckley. "We all understand that these products are safe when we use them with caution and do not let them come in direct contact with children, they are effective. These products can be used safely at home – they can certainly be used safely at a school."

The CALPIRG report commends and awards an "A" rating to Los Angeles Unified School District's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Program, which provides a list of district "banned" and "limited use" products, all of which are registered and tested through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the California Department of Pesticide Regulation. Part of LA's IPM program does, however, include an emergency exemption provision wherein the district's IPM Coordinator "may allow trained district staff or a company... to apply a pesticide not on the (District's IPM program) 'approved' or 'limited' use lists if necessary for the protection of public health." School districts throughout California see this provision as a health-minded, true IPM approach.

"The San Juan Unified School District supports this position as a more reasonable approach to the pesticide problems that our schools face," said Bob Tarczy, Supervisor of Maintenance and Operations for San Juan Unified, Sacramento, California.

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation oversees and tracks the application of pest control products. A licensed professional must oversee the application of any pesticide product, whether in a school or agricultural setting, and must track and report these applications to local and state authorities.

"From a safety standpoint, we hate to see any organization promoting the outright banning of any product," said Beckley. "While a school district certainly should not apply pest control products willy-nilly, they should also be able to utilize an effective, appropriate method of putting an end to any pest that endangers the health and safety of our children."

"Sometimes the best solution is the safe and appropriate use of pesticides," said Harold M Koenig, MD, Vice Admiral, Medical Corps, United States Navy (retired). Koenig, former Surgeon General of the Navy and Chief, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, issued a letter on the issue of schools and pests in a report from CropLife America and the Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment. "Too often, the issue becomes polarized, digressing into ill-formed, reckless and potentially dangerous proposals to ban pesticide use altogether – which loses sight of the greater health threats," he added.

For more information on this issue, please contact the California Plant Health Association, (916) 446-3316.

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