

**The Register-Guard**<http://www.registerguard.com/>

---

**[Reduce pesticide risks](#)****Senate bill leads schools toward sound practices**Posted to Web: **Wednesday, Jun 3, 2009 05:02PM**Appeared in print: **Wednesday, Jun 3, 2009, page A6**

---

Conflicts over pesticide safety have raged in Oregon for decades and are not likely to be resolved anytime soon, but everyone can agree on at least one principle: Children should not be exposed to poisons. That principle is incorporated in a broadly supported legislative proposal to require that schools adopt plans for using the least toxic available means for controlling rodents, insects and weeds.

During a 10-year period ending in 2007, the state Department of Agriculture recorded 47 cases of pesticide exposure in Oregon schools or at school bus stops, some of them resulting in school closures, hospitalizations or complaints of health problems among students and staff. In a 2004 incident at Canby High School, a container of the insecticide Malathion shattered during an experiment in a science class, splashing some students' eyes and resulting in the evacuation of the entire school.

No law can put an end to carelessness or stupidity. But Senate Bill 637 would encourage common sense and restraint in pesticide use. The bill would require school districts to adopt Integrated Pest Management plans. Such plans generally lead to the use of pesticides as a last resort, and even then ensure that precautions are taken to minimize the risk of human exposure.

SB 637 would cost the state nothing. Some school districts, including the Eugene School District, have IPM plans in place already.

The Portland School District, the state's largest, implemented an IPM plan 10 years ago at a cost of \$30,000 to \$40,000 for its 100 schools. Smaller districts' costs would be proportionately less. SB 637 calls upon Oregon State University to develop a model IPM plan, which ought to reduce school districts' implementation costs still further.

The Portland district estimates that its annual costs have increased \$18,000 because of the plan, mostly because it takes staff and contractors more time to use less-toxic pest control methods before resorting to pesticides. Again, smaller districts' costs would be proportionately less. A good IPM plan can even result in lower costs, because poisons are expensive, while nontoxic methods of pest control — cleaning up kitchens and cafeterias to reduce rodents' food sources, for example — are often practices of common sense and good sanitation. And by minimizing the effects of pesticide exposure, including worrisome long-term health effects, school districts can avoid costs that far exceed the expense of adopting and following an IPM plan.

SB 637 had its genesis in the 2007 legislative session, when anti-pesticide groups sought to establish pesticide-free buffer zones around schools. That proposal met stiff resistance from farm and forestry organizations. The buffer zone proposal failed, but then-Sen. Brad Avakian convened a work group led by state Rep. Suzanne Bonomici and others to examine the issue of pesticide safety in and around schools. The result is SB 636, sponsored by Bonamici, which has the support of interests ranging from the Oregon Toxics Alliance to Oregonians for Food and Shelter.

Using the least toxic effective means of pest control possible makes sense for environmental, economic and public health reasons — and nowhere more so than in and around schools. SB 637 passed the Senate by a vote of 22-6 last month and could come up for a vote in the House this week. It should be passed and signed into law by the governor.

---

Copyright © 2009 — The Register-Guard, Eugene, Oregon, USA