

IPM: ON THE VERGE OF ACCEPTANCE?

Integrated pest management is gaining ground in some circles as the industry realizes it's not meant to 'do away' with anything.

by Jack Simonds, contributing editor

Run the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) issue up the flagpole and see how it flies.

The IPM banner has been flapping heartily in the winds as researchers, industry watchers and green industry practitioners alike enjoy a robust debate over IPM: its mission, its benefits, even its definition.

To hear Dr. Gerard Ferrentino tell it, IPM methods have not simply carved a niche in the landscaping industry. IPM is on the verge of a full arrival.

"There is no doubt that pesticides work and are an important tool," Ferrentino says. But, the ornamentals IPM coordinator at Cornell University also notes: "In an IPM program, our main focus is how to use pesticides better and maximize their use. *IPM does not mean do away with chemicals.* I think we'll see its use grow tremendously in the next couple of years."

The proving ground

The test area for Ferrentino's conclusions came from just outside his office window: the 310-acre Cornell University itself.

Working with the university's ground maintenance crews, the turfgrass science program sought to reduce pesticide use employing IPM methods which include soap and oil applications, pruning, plant selection, vacuuming, turf removal and other alternatives.

The pest maintenance program was employed campus-wide on 79 acres of trees, 20 miles of walkways, 12 to 15 miles of roads and about 114 acres of parking lot space; a good mix of land uses in a concentrated space.

"(Alternative) methods work and when applied at the right time are safe to use," Ferrentino asserts.

IPM, if not on the verge of full and widespread use, is certainly a popular commodity on the conference circuit. Scarcely a conference in the green industry convenes without IPM figuring prominently on the agenda.

IPM is hot stuff, to be sure, but for the "mom-and-pop" landscape manager, the question remains: Is IPM a passing fancy or are today's murmurings a foreshadowing of things to come?

What's in the way?

Dr. James Wilkinson, chief operating officer with Lawnmark of Hudson, Ohio, says "practical obstacles" still exist for widespread IPM use.

Wilkinson believes that some

stumbling blocks remain:

● **Customer expectation.** In some cases, Wilkinson argues, homeowners finding the lone dandelion or single grub will insist on a new, lawnwide spraying, which "flies in the face" of the intent of IPM.

● **Employee training.** With the inherent high turnover in the lawn care industry, keeping a "true practitioner" of IPM on staff can be difficult.

● **Follow-up monitoring.** Here, Wilkinson notes that with many landscaping firms basing profits on number of lawns or square feet serviced in a season or simply the amount of billing dollars per season, field applicators and technicians simply "don't have the time to get down on their hands and knees to do monitoring or diagnosis."

Follow-up monitoring, all connected with IPM agree, is a cornerstone to its success.

Nonetheless, Wilkinson and Dr. David Sheltar, entomologist with Ohio State University's Cooperative Extension Service, agree that IPM has a place in the industry and time may allow its foothold to become firmer.

"We need to consider all the control options. All too easily we reach for the container of pesticide and take a whiz at it and hope that will take care of the problem," Sheltar says.

Localized tracking

Sheltar agrees that the industry needs to focus on finding "efficient ways of monitoring pest activity."

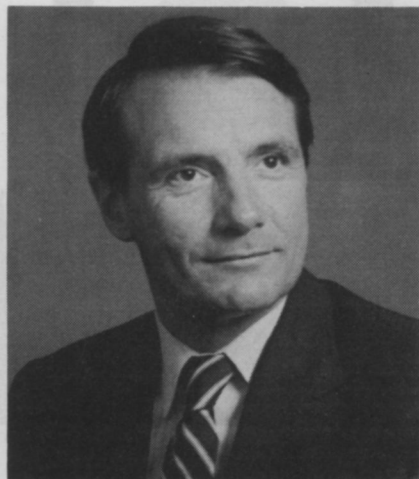
Sheltar advances the notion of monitoring by neighborhood, charting pest, weed and disease infestations which may occur commonly to a localized area and perhaps employing billbags, pitfall traps or other non-chemical techniques as dictated by common sense.

Sheltar laments about the "hose jockey" or "nozzle head" characterization of the green industry; IPM makes sense, he says, when one considers that "no one single control will succeed."

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Dr. Gerard Ferrentino: IPM will grow "tremendously."



Dr. James Wilkinson: Customer demands often run counter to IPM.

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"(IPM) is not an organic (or) biological program. It can contain both those elements. It is also not a 'no-pesticides' program," Shetlar observes.

The "no pesticides" aspect of IPM surfaces time and again as specialists gather to air out where the practice is and where it is headed.

Ferrentino, for example, pens an "IPM Corner" in a department newsletter, "Cornell University Turfgrass Times." In the fall issue, he highlighted IPM's overall definition as a preventive practice and its techniques for success which include monitoring and record-keeping, not dodging the common complaint that these elements often receive resistance because of perceptions they lower productivity.

"IPM practitioners," wrote Ferrentino, "follow fundamental pest management principles to develop strategies that integrate chemical, biological, cultural and mechanical methods to prevent or control pests."

A good working definition and one likely not to cause much consternation, it is true.

But as IPM continues as a hit on the convention circuit, it still apparently isn't playing well in Peoria. **LM**

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