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CLUTTER CONTROL



It's a fact that we may not want to hear, but clutter does not inspire, it creates *chaos* ...And of course nice nesting habitat for mice which often follow. No true clutter connoisseur lives or works alone!

A cluttered workspace, be it a classroom or kitchen, creates barriers to efficiency and an environment in which many (including students) may feel stressed with the informational and visual overload. Clutter also contributes to the accumulation of dust and provides harborage for insects, such as cockroaches. According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, insect allergens (which often come from insect feces and dead insects) along with dust mites account for two out of the six most common **indoor asthma triggers**. In this way, clutter is more than a stress-inducer – it can also be a health concern.

Asthma accounts for more than 14 million missed school days each year and is the leading cause of hospital visits among children. Approximately one out of every 13 school-aged kids has asthma, which means your school probably has at least one in each class. Keeping insect allergens and dust at a minimum will improve the indoor air quality for *all* students and staff, especially those who are asthmatic.

**When your health and that of a child
are tied to clutter issues, de-cluttering
becomes more than a suggestion.
It becomes a necessity.**

De-cluttering has the immediate effect of eliminating pest harborage. When clutter is reduced, there is increased access to floor spaces, allowing for more thorough cleaning by custodial staff. The same is true for shelves and inside cupboards. When there are nooks and crannies – created by "stuff" – for pests to hide and breed among, there will be allergens and lots of bugs.



Clutter control also helps improve overall school hygiene. It's easier for custodial staff to sweep, mop, and dust when things are generally organized. Minimizing clutter also helps teachers stay organized. It's much easier to keep your room tidy when your cupboards and bookshelves are not overflowing with stuff!

HOW do you de-clutter a school?



Kitchen staff

- ☑ Do not use corrugated cardboard for long term storage. German cockroaches are actually brought inside our schools hiding in the corrugations. They actually feed on the glue starch that holds the boxes together. **Rotate out all corrugated cardboard if possible.**
- ☑ Keep pantry shelving free of needless debris. Emptied supply boxes should be broken down and recycled rapidly.
- ☑ Clutter is also a problem around and in drains: debris blocking and clogging up drains can not only lead to maintenance issues, but drain flies love to breed in the scum that accumulates around the edges (and bleach won't help!). Make sure all drains have covers, especially sink drains. There are heavy duty metal sink-drain baskets that can be dish washed.



Custodians

Though you are the sanitarians of your schools, in general you are not responsible for de-cluttering areas other than your own. Custodians can set a great precedent by maintaining well organized custodial closets.

- ☑ Hang brooms and mops (head end up) on a wall rack; brooms & mops are pest havens as they contain food, moisture, and a protected area in which to feed & breed. Keep these items hung up ☺
- ☑ **Get good shelving!** Too often, custodians have no shelving or organizational features in their closets. However, this is a "pest vulnerable area" and without organization it can lead to a rapid decline toward bugs, dirt and filth. Shelves should be wire (not wood), with the bottom shelf a minimum of 6" off the ground to allow for cleaning under. Use the IPM/IAQ program you are part of as leverage for good quality shelving that will get your school on the right track.

Custodians: make sure your closets are not reservoirs for cans of illicit pesticide sprays, from classrooms or elsewhere.





Teachers

As the educators in your school, you have a great opportunity to set an example for students and staff. Get the kids to help out with the following suggestions, too!

- ☑ Art supplies – Cockroaches dine on glue, and crickets, termites, booklice and silverfish (among others) will readily consume paper. One guess as to what they do with macaroni noodles and rice! Keep glue containers clean and capped. Store art supplies in plastic pest-proof containers, such as Tupperware or Rubbermaid, with tight-fitting lids.
- ☑ Storage closets – have you ever seen a well organized teacher's closet? We have and generally they belong to the best of the best teachers we know. We appreciate that it's tough for teachers to create projects and educate on a budget; of course you want to keep all that stuff! But ask yourself one question: **have you used it in the last 2 years?** If the answer is no, then toss (or recycle) it. This goes for the rest of your classroom, too. No cheating by stuffing storage bins full of things you plan to get to "one day". *Benefit from the extra space and let the clutter go!*
- ☑ For everything that's left, organize it and store it in plastic tubs with tight-fitting lids. No boxes – **you're importing cockroaches AND feeding them when you use corrugated cardboard!**
- ☑ End-of-week 15 minute desk clean off. 🕒 Think "file not pile". Documents go in one of 3 places: the file cabinet, recycle bin, or trash. Have students do this with their desks as well!

Not all clutter is trash; it's up to each of us to decide what is worth keeping and store it properly. Maintaining an uncluttered and organized classroom sets the tone for an organized day.



Reducing classroom clutter helps custodial staff do their job more effectively, too!



Lost & found

- ☑ **Principals** - make sure there is a designated person responsible for maintaining this area. Pest inspections almost always reveal a neglected lost & found area, with clothes lying on the floor in heaps. This is wonderful pest harborage, and you can expect to find cockroaches, mice, ants and crickets.

Remember:

Clutter control reduces pest harborage, improves sanitation, and ultimately improves the quality of indoor air that staff and students breathe each day.

Arizona IPM/IAQ News

The **Arizona School IPM Coalition** will held its 5th meeting on July 19th, 2005. It covered many topics of IPM, the expanding Coalition, and recent research conducted by UA folks. If you're interested in the minutes, let us know and we'll send an electronic copy.

Arizona's IPM in Schools program welcomes a new district: The **Phoenix Catholic Diocese schools**. Most Holy Trinity schools (pre-K through 8th grade) is the pilot site for this district. Welcome!

Congratulations to **Washington Elementary, Mesa Public, and Kyrene School Districts** for receiving the Children's Environmental Recognition Award from the Environmental Protection Agency. These folks are highly committed to implementing and improving IPM in schools throughout their district.

Clutterbug Award

We're asking folks to e-mail us pictures of the worst cases of clutter they've seen (with permission from the clutterbug, of course).

The "winner" will receive the "*Clutterbug Award*" for 2005 and a free stack of storage bins!



Information sources:

1. Arizona Asthma Coalition. Website: www.azasthma.org
2. Beyond Pesticides. School Pesticide Monitor. March/April 2004.
3. Salam, Muhammad Towhid, Yu-Fen Li, Bryan Langholz, and Frank Davis Gilliland. May 2004. Early Life Environmental Risk Factors for Asthma: findings from the Children's Health Study. Environmental Health Perspectives. 112: 760-765.
4. USEPA Indoor Air – IAQ Tools for Schools. Website: www.epa.gov/iaq/schools/images

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Few bugs are bad! More than 95% of all insect species are beneficial to humans