Open dialogue with the urban pest control industry and UI Extension

AT A GLANCE
UI Extension and ISDA Pesticide Stewardship Conference leads to incorporating integrated pest management (IPM) practices between the pesticide industry and stakeholders.

The Situation
In the past, the pest control industry would recommend pesticide treatments regardless of pest presence, population level or if the suspected pest is harmless to the customer. This classic business model promoted prescheduled and often unnecessary pesticide applications that may have been illegal under Idaho Pesticides and Chemigation Law (IDAPA 02.03.03).

The difficulty in defining a pest is also of concern. Some potential customers may request pest control companies to apply treatments regardless of the pest and the damage it may or may not be causing. In these circumstances, education and community outreach may be the key to solving some of the factors involved in urban pesticide settings. The other side of the coin lies with the customers and their opinions of what may be considered a pest species that requires a professional pest control pesticide treatment.

Many businesses, property managers and homeowners rely on local pest control applicators to provide various pesticide treatments year-round. This is especially prevalent in southern Idaho’s Treasure Valley urban environment, where pest control companies are numerous and have been increasing over the past 20 years.

Our Response
The University of Idaho (UI) Extension Pesticide Safety Education Program and Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) co-sponsored a conference that was held in Boise during the winter of 2017. This conference offered 10 recertification credits for pesticide license holders in Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

The conference was well attended by pest control owners, managers, applicators and Extension educators. Important factors concerning the pest control industry include public perception of the pest problem, proper chemical use, environmental quality and business transparency to the clientele.
In a breakout session geared towards urban and ornamental pest management, Brad Stokes UI Extension educator in Elmore County discussed: urban arthropod identification and management. This topic included the intricacies of arthropod identification and control practices while implementing Integrated Pest Management (IPM). During the presentation, there was an open discussion among the owners, managers, applicators and educators regarding the struggles of educating their clients on IPM practices as opposed to the standard and regularly prescheduled chemical treatments commonly applied to urban areas.

The conference explored multifaceted options of how to incorporate IPM into the standard business model. Dialogue included a weighted concept of securing quality business practices even when pest control professionals do not recommend a pesticide treatment. This sparked an exchange of ideas. Acknowledging the practice of identifying a pest problem (or lack thereof) is routinely discounted as an effort in pest management. Educating customers on proper pesticide use, pest identification, life cycle and when treatments need to be applied is the key for urban pest control companies and potential clientele. Incorporating IPM practices into the urban pesticide-industry was the conclusion of the breakout session.

Program Outcomes

The UI Extension Pesticide Stewardship Conference bridged and identified gaps between pest control owners, managers, applicators and educators. Fostering candid dialogue about incorporating a widely approved and scientifically based IPM program which improves their current pest control business model. For example, the focus of pesticide treatments should be on a case-by-case basis by treating the outbreak, if it occurs, unlike scheduling a treatment without knowing the entirety of the situation. Since this has been repeatedly used by urban pest control companies who sell pesticide treatments to as many clients or customers as possible, one of the pillars practiced in IPM is recommending no treatment or control of a pest, especially if the pest has inconsequential or limited damage potential. Participants in the conference settled on a better standard of treatment. This will cultivate long term benefits while building company-customer-client relationships. It enhances the sustained viability of the urban pest control industry in Idaho.

Participants agreed that implementing a successful IPM program into their standard business model and approaching the clientele in a different way are important to gaining long-term clientele retention. As suggested in the presentation, urban pest control requires educating and informing the clientele of healthy natural environments. This must include scouting for pest issues, proper pest identification and pest control methodology. This balance creates a bond of trust between the pest management industry and the general public, a relationship that will benefit Idaho and its growing urban economy.

The Future

Certainly, contradictory beliefs will arise within the traditional pest control industry. The Pesticide Stewardship Conference strengthened relationships within pest control industry and educators on the perceptions of pesticide use. Future collaboration between the pest control industry and educators on all aspects of management involving pest identification, pest life cycle and action plans, including the absence of treatment, is expected. Involving urban pest control owners, managers, applicators, land-grant university educators and government regulatory-agency leaders in open dialogue shifted pest management practices. Tackling pest management as a cooperative group through the exchange of ideas and solutions will give voice to a future of maintaining Idaho’s urban environment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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