

Maryland hospitals cutting toxic pesticides

By [Sara Michael](#)

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Hospitals are normally a place to get well — not to be exposed to toxic chemicals. But many health care facilities rely on toxic chemicals for pest control, prompting several local hospitals to vow to use safer ways to kill ants, roaches and termites.

“We’re not adding to the problem, and that’s important to us,” said Chris Seale, environmental services director at Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Johns Hopkins is one of 13 health care facilities moving toward less-toxic ways of ridding the halls and grounds of pests.

Rather than spraying the grounds for pests, Hopkins and others are focused on preventing them by filling crevices, tightly sealing doors, and keeping food and storage areas clean. They also use only the least-toxic pesticides as a last resort.

This shift comes on the heels of a 2005-2006 survey conducted by the Integrated Pest Management in Health Care Facilities Project that found most hospitals rely on toxic pesticides that have been linked to cancer, birth defects, kidney damage, and neurological, reproductive and developmental effects.

“The Maryland data reflect common practices and are no different from what’s going on nationwide,” said Jay Feldman, executive director of Beyond Pesticides, a national organization that partnered with the Maryland Pesticide Network and the Maryland Hospitals for a Healthy Environment for this project.

Nearly half of the sites surveyed said their pest management plans should solve the pest problem at the source, but they continued to use toxic pesticides as a first resort.

“People served by these facilities don’t need to be exposed to toxic byproducts,” said Ruth Berlin, executive director of the Maryland Pesticide Network.

The findings led to a pilot program with seven facilities in 2006 agreeing to developing less-toxic pest management plans. Another six facilities joined this year. Officials at the Integrated Pest Management in Health Care Facilities Project have provided the tools and recommendations for these facilities to move to non-chemical pest management.

Hospitals also must partner with the vendors providing the services, Feldman said.

Most health care facilities contract out the pest management, relying on the expertise of the vendor and providing little oversight, the survey found. But as more hospitals demand the less-toxic management plans, more companies will respond, said Brian Dorsey, facilities manager at Oak Crest, an Erickson retirement community in Parkville.

“As the pressure on vendors continues, we will have a resonating effect on the industry,” he said.

Erickson Retirement Communities has a companywide policy for less-toxic pest management, which includes using organic products, baiting pests and educating residents on how to keep areas pest-free.

[Click here to read the report from the Maryland Pesticide Network: http://www.mdpestnet.org/publications/IPM_in_HCF.pdf](http://www.mdpestnet.org/publications/IPM_in_HCF.pdf)

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