

## Team-building leads to success in Schenectady, NY

When project manager Deborah Laurange started work at her new Asset Management Property (AMP) at Schenectady Municipal Housing Authority in 2011, 10% of the units had reported active bed bug infestations. The site is a 7-story, 101 unit high-rise built in 1961, housing primarily elderly and handicapped residents in one-bedroom and studio apartments. The building uses trash chutes, has utilities in the basement, and offices on first floor. Pest control was contracted to a small, local company that managed pests on a calendar-based schedule.

### Connecting Pest Problems to Solutions

The housing authority had good record keeping, but the reports were not coordinated into a system for tracking units. Monthly reports from the Pest Management Professional (PMP) included check boxes for evidence of roaches, mice or "other infestations" and a place to note unsanitary or cluttered conditions. These reports, however, were not linked to other information systems such as work orders for maintenance or resident case support notes. Pest management and maintenance staff members were returning to the same units over and over, while pest problems continued.



### Train Staff, Then Residents

The housing authority requested the *Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in Multifamily Housing Training* provided by the Northeastern IPM Center. They pulled together a group of stakeholders to attend the day-long event, including executive

management, resident support services, maintenance, the PMP, and residents. The training was the first step in helping everyone to see the important role that each one plays in pest control. That was the beginning of a process that led to successful IPM implementation at Deborah Laurange's AMP of the Schenectady Municipal Housing Authority.

After the whole team attended the IPM training, Laurange organized a tenant training session using the presentation and handouts provided by the Northeastern IPM Center (<http://www.stoppests.org/working-with-residents/residents-briefing-video/>). "That really got the tenants on board," she said, "especially with garbage issues within units and buildings, and how trash is disposed of and picked up. When the tenants saw that we were all focusing on it, they got on board too." This created a team spirit of working together rather than pointing fingers and assigning blame. "They saw us responding quickly when needed, and joined us in doing their part. Now, they report any issues right away. The IPM training helped us open communication between staff and residents, and that grew to include residents talking with each other."

### **Build a Collaborative Spirit**

Building this spirit of collaboration was one of the biggest challenges Laurange faced with her team. In the past, pest control was thought of as being the sole responsibility of the contracted PMP. Residents and staff did not consider it to be part of their job. "The biggest hurdle is getting everyone to accept and embrace their role," said Laurange, "but just educating everyone on some simple steps like sealing up a garbage bag at night, washing dishes, covering pet foods, and taking trash out daily made a big difference."

The combination of holding large group training for staff, management, pest control and residents, plus the shorter individual tenant training, helped get everyone on the same page. They knew that to manage pests, they would have to monitor and report pest activity and eliminate pest access to food, water and shelter with good building-wide maintenance and resident housekeeping standards. When a new tenant moves in to the building, an occupancy specialist now gives them an IPM kit and brief orientation.

"When everyone understood their role in the IPM program and saw good results after they executed their roles, the objections went away. Maintenance saw a reduction in calls to units, and tenants saw fewer pests."

### **Keeping Up The Communication**

Now, Laurange conducts weekly meetings with occupancy and maintenance staff to reiterate the importance of working together and responding to any issues or concerns about pest control right away. She made sanitary inspections a priority and together the team began to address issues in units, including housekeeping and maintenance problems. They took the time to plug holes and fix leaks and drips. "We also looked at the building in general, including hallways, elevators, laundry rooms," she said. "I really made it my priority, and when the tenants saw the staff making it a priority, they began to make it a priority as well."

As a result of this increased focus, communication continued to improve between staff and tenants. "We have a hotline system as I imagine many housing authorities do. Now, both the PMP and maintenance staff are notified, so they have the same list to go around to inspect, fix, and treat."

"The overall communication between team members has improved greatly. We are quicker to inspect and take any necessary action. We started the process because of bed bugs, but now we can see that it applies to everything else as well."

Laurange also saw significant improvement in communication and collaboration with the contracted PMP. "Everyone began to realize that the IPM program was not something that we were going to just sit on a shelf. It was something we were all going to actively do on a daily basis," she said.

### **Get Support From The Top**

According to Laurange, it was critically important to have the support of the executive director in implementing the new system. Other key staff members who were brought on board included the tenant investigator and the caseworks for senior and disabled residents. This management and support team worked together to ensure lease compliance with housekeeping standards, and to coordinate any outside services needed for residents for them to comply.

### **Data Management**

One challenge they faced was keeping track of the new, increased volume of information coming in, but now that a few months have gone by they are on top of the information flow. Once the long-term issues were addressed, the overall volume has been reduced. "Now we can deal with new concerns as they come up," said Laurange "There are fewer calls for service. Reports are coming in saying good, good, good"

**Cost Savings**

While Laurange reports that in the short term there was some increase in labor time for maintenance staff, charges from the PMP have been reduced by almost 25% from last year.

**Records Tell a Story**

“Coordinating record keeping is definitely worth doing. There’s no way to do this without it. It was hard at first, but has been so worth it. You have to take the information and organize it so you can use it. The reports tell a story that is invaluable. Now you know the history. You know if this is something new or an ongoing problem. With that information, you can focus your action to be most effective for each situation.” The records help management begin to understand each location more thoroughly, including which pests are present and what resources are needed to address the situation. “When you’re challenged on it, and you will be,” says Laurange, “you can stand up and say ‘this is what it is and this is what we’ve done to address it.’”

FOCUS UNIT TRACKING LOG								
Name/Address of Property: _____								
<i>The purpose of this sheet is to tie together the pest control, housing, and maintenance record keeping systems. It should be in the front of the IPM log. The IPM team must identify areas or units of focus and coordinate IPM efforts.</i>								
Date	Unit / Location	Name of Staff Member / Technician	Pest Level	Repairs Needed		Recent or Current Focus Unit?	Housekeeping / Lease Compliance	
			If there is any evidence of pests, write in the type of pest and circle level of infestation. PMP involvement is assumed.	Work order number or problem description	Check when completed	Yes or No	Housekeeping level* (circle one)	Action taken (e.g., met with tenant, sent violation notice, other)
			Type of Pest: Light Moderate Heavy				G F P	
			Type of Pest: Light Moderate Heavy				G F P	
			Type of Pest: Light Moderate Heavy				G F P	
			Type of Pest: Light Moderate Heavy				G F P	
			Type of Pest: Light Moderate Heavy				G F P	

\* Housekeeping level:  
 G Good—little or no food or water accessible to pests, easy to move throughout the unit, and inspection in all areas is possible  
 F Fair—dishes left undone for more than one day, or plenty of food or water accessible to pests, or PMP has to step over or move items to inspect  
 P Poor—multiple days of dirty dishes, food storage feeds pests, PMPs inspection and service limited by clutter  
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Example of a Focus Unit Tracking Log  
 (available at: <http://www.stoppests.org/ipm-training/training-materials/>)

With lessons learned and success in the first building, the team applied some of what they knew to a pest problem at another AMP. An overall review of maintenance and housekeeping issues was developed, and any issues were addressed both inside units and in the common areas of the building. From there, they began an intensive monitoring and reporting process that helped to identify focus units. Those units that needed more attention from maintenance, pest control and resident support were noted and monitored, including records of action needed and action taken. Because the team was now coordinating information, it was faster and easier to identify the right response needed to correct each individual situation. This focused attention directs resources to areas that have the most impact in pest control.

"It's an everyday thing. You just need to get everyone on the same page and keep working away at it," says Laurange. "When you do that, it works."

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Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an effective and environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that relies on a combination of common-sense practices. IPM programs use current, comprehensive information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment. This information, in combination with available pest control methods, is used to manage pest damage by the most economical means, and with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment. (EPA)

For more information and resources visit; [www.stoppests.org](http://www.stoppests.org)