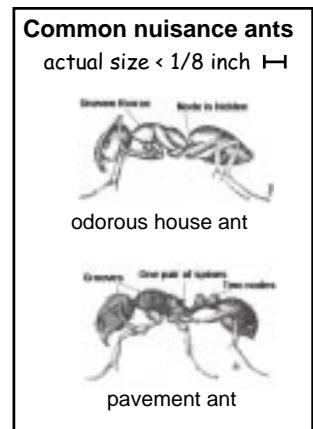


# (Non-wood destroying) Nuisance Ants in PPS Schools

*This handout was prepared by Portland Parents for Alternatives to Pesticides (PPAP) as part of our effort to promote safer pest control methods and reduction of pesticide use in PPS schools. (February 2003)*

**About Ants:** There are many species of ant in Oregon. All are beneficial in the environment, feeding on other insect pests and helping break down woody debris to create new soil.

Ants do not transmit any human diseases, and most ants common in western Oregon are harmless. A few ants can bite if provoked. Carpenter ants are the only ants that can damage structures. See additional handout, *Wood-destroying Ants in PPS Schools*, for more about these ants. Non-wood destroying ants may actually help prevent damage to structures, as ants are major predators of another wood-destroying species, the termite.



Non-wood destroying ants may nest outdoors in soil or moist wood, or within wall voids of structures. Pavement ants nest in soil under concrete walkways or foundations. Ants sometimes enter buildings in search of food or water, or during periods of heavy rain. Some sugar-feeding ants may move indoors in winter when their preferred food source (honeydew from plants) is gone. Ants may also be more noticeable in spring or summer as colonies are dividing and establishing new nests.

**When Ants Come Inside:** Total eradication of nuisance ants indoors is probably not possible. Fortunately, ants will frequently leave on their own if denied access to food and water. Additional control measures are warranted if ants are entering a school in large enough numbers to cause a disruption in the learning environment.

PPAP urges that non-chemical methods (such as sanitation and crack sealing) be used first, and that boric acid baits be considered as a last resort, if other methods fail. We disagree with PPS procedure that allows insecticide sprays (nerve poisons) to be used in and around schools. These nerve poisons pose risks to children and school staff, unlike the ants that they are used to control. For more about pesticides, see the next page.

If nuisance ants become a disruption at your school, take the following steps:

- Ask the custodian to vacuum any food crumbs, clean up any garbage or spills, and to use soap and water to clean areas where ant trails are seen. This can prevent other ants from following the pheromone trails that ants leave to mark the way to food.
- Make sure that any other food or water sources are removed, placed in tightly sealed containers, cleaned, or repaired. Food and water sources can include human or pet food, recycling bins, leaking faucets, clogged drains, damp wood, etc. Call Randall Johnston at PPS Maintenance Services (916-3439) if their services are required.
- If you find a place where an ant trail enters the room or building, be sure to mark it for later sealing by PPS facilities staff or the district's pest control contractor. A temporary "seal" can be made with duct tape, if desired.

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- Call PPS Custodial Services (916-3310) if ants pose a continuing or serious disruption. PPAP suggests that you tell the district that you want the pest control contractor to use non-chemical methods first, and boric acid baits only as a last resort. However, be aware that under current district procedures, the contractor may use insecticide sprays (nerve poisons).

**About Pesticides:** According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, "By their very nature, most pesticides create some risk of harm - Pesticides can cause harm to humans, animals, or the environment because they are designed to kill or otherwise adversely affect living organisms." In addition, pesticides are only temporary fixes for pest problems. PPAP's goal is to urge PPS to use more permanent and less-toxic pest control solutions.

At the urging of our group, and out of concern about the hazards that pesticides pose to children, school staff, and the environment, the PPS school board adopted a policy (in May 2001) to reduce and eliminate the use of pesticides whenever feasible (see Board policy 3.30.082-P). Pesticides may be applied to district properties only by licensed pesticide applicators operating under PPS procedures. It is a violation of district policy for anyone else to apply pesticides (including baits) in PPS facilities or on PPS grounds without district approval. Contact Environmental Health and Safety (916-3331) if you have any questions about this policy.

**PPAP's Suggested Guidelines for Treating Nuisance Ants:** PPAP urges the district to use appropriate sanitation, caulking, sealing, nest vacuuming (if possible), repairs, or habitat modification measures first, and consider the use of low-toxicity, non-volatile pesticide baits if these other measures fail to reduce an ant population that is disruptive.

PPAP objects to the use of insecticide sprays because of the potential human health hazards they pose. Insecticides are also repellant to ants and can interfere with a baiting program. They can also make ant problems worse by causing ants to disperse and form new colonies and nests.

Our research indicates that boric acid baits are one of the most effective and least-toxic control options for many nuisance ants, including odorous house ants and pavement ants. Preferably, baits should be placed in child-proof containers and out of sight and reach of children/students. Small amounts of loose boric acid gels or pastes can also be placed in cracks and crevices, or boric acid dusts or aerosols can be sprayed into wall voids. Boric acid baits take some time to work, but they are more effective than sprays over the long run. Boric acid baits and dusts are effective in very small quantities. Boric acid is a slow-acting poison, allowing foraging ants to live long enough to carry it back to the nest where it poisons other ants. In this way, an entire colony can be eliminated.

**Ensuring Successful Pest Control:** You can help ensure successful control of nuisance ants by helping keep the affected area as clean as possible, and by making sure that the district is notified of any repair or maintenance work that needs to be addressed. Sanitation and maintenance or repairs may be enough to eliminate an ant problem. Sanitation is also important to ensure the effectiveness of any baits that the district may use. Ants are less likely to take a bait if there are more attractive food and water sources nearby.

*For more information about PPAP and our work, visit our Web site at: <<http://ppaponline.org>>*