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**CLUTTER
CONTROL**



The Clutterbug!

Species Description. I am a self-confessed, reforming Clutterbug. Those of us in this group belong to the unscientific and completely made up Family Thrownnothingaway-idae, in the Genus Imightneeditlater-us. My particular species is *Cellulosus stackus*. (I end up with stacks of paper, uncertain of where to file it all.)

Behavior. “I might need it later.” “Don’t dump it.” Is it possible to change this behavior? I watched Mission Organization and Clean Sweep to learn how professionals clean up. My conclusion is that it’s much easier to toss somebody else’s stuff than your own because it’s all a matter of perspective: what’s important and what’s not. Having said that, I would like to convince you that it is absolutely imperative to keep clutter to a minimum, not only from a pest perspective, but also from an organizational and learning environment perspective. Uncluttering, like pest management, is an on-going process. So remember, “*Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a process, not a miracle.*” I propose a corollary: “*Uncluttering is a process, not a miracle.*”

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 children) 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. Keeping insect allergens and dust at a minimum will improve the indoor air quality for *all* children 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 facility hygiene. It’s easier for custodial staff to sweep, mop, and dust when things are generally organized.

Minimizing clutter also helps educators 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 child care facility?



Food Areas

- ☑ Do not use corrugated cardboard for long term storage. German cockroaches can be brought inside buildings by 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 cannot only lead to maintenance issues, but drain flies love to breed in the scum that accumulates around the edges (and bleach won’t help!). Drains covers can be used, especially in sink drains. There are heavy-duty metal sink-drain baskets that can be dish washed.



Custodians and Cleaning Supply Areas

Though you are the sanitarians of your facility, 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, cleaning supply areas have no shelving or organizational features. 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 underneath.



Teachers and Staff

As the educators in your facility, you have a great opportunity to set an example for the children. Get them 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 with tight-fitting lids.
- ☑ Storage closets – We appreciate that it’s tough for educators 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 areas 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 clutter helps custodial staff do their job more effectively, too!



Lost & found

- ☑ **Directors** - 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.

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

For more information on integrated pest management (IPM):

Visit the Pennsylvania Integrated Pest Management Program’s (PA IPM) website, www.paipm.org. The Pennsylvania IPM Program is a collaboration between Penn State and the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture aimed at promoting integrated pest management in both agricultural and urban situations.

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