Nuisance Ants in PPS Schools

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. 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 aphids) 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 extremely difficult. The district's first response to any trail of ants is to clean surfaces with a disinfectant. 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. The district will use mechanical methods (such as crack sealing) first, and may use non-chemical pesticide products in conjunction. The district will use least-toxic pesticide baits only as a last resort.

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. For repairs, ask your custodian to fill out a work request on line.
- If you find a place where an ant trail enters the room or building, be sure to mark it for later sealing by the district's pest control contractor. A temporary "seal" can be made with duct tape, if desired.
- Call Custodial Services at extension 4434 if ants pose a continuing or serious disruption. They will schedule a visit by the district's IPM pest control contractor.

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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" (http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/about/). Due to concern about the hazards that pesticides pose to children, school staff, and the environment, it is PPS policy 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 Health and Safety at 503 916-3401 if you have any questions about this policy.

PPS Guidelines for Treating Nuisance Ants: Under PPS guidelines for nuisance ants, the district will use appropriate sanitation, caulking, sealing, repairs, habitat modification and other mechanical measures first and consider the use of least-toxic pesticides only if these other measures fail to reduce an ant population that is disruptive.

If pesticides are deemed necessary, the district's pest control contractor will use a natural pesticide product or low-toxicity, non-volatile boric acid baits whenever possible. When the contractor uses baits they will be placed in child-proof containers, and used only in areas that are out of sight and reach of children/students. Small amounts of boric acid gels or pastes may also be placed in cracks and crevices or boric acid dusts or aerosols may be sprayed into wall voids. Insecticide sprays will not be used, as they are repellant to ants and can interfere with a baiting program. They sometimes make ant problems worse by causing certain ants to disperse and form new colonies and nests.

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 to notify the district of any repair or maintenance work that needs to be done. Sanitation and maintenance or repairs may be enough to eliminate an ant problem. Sanitation also is important to ensure the effectiveness of any baits that are used. Ants are less likely to take a bait if there are more attractive food and water sources nearby.

Boric acid baits also will take some time to work but this is what makes them effective over the long run. 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.

Thanks for your patience and cooperation as we work together to keep PPS schools clean and free of harmful pesticides or nuisance pests.

PPS Environmental Health and Safety, 503 916-3401


Pavement ant worker