The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CWF) is the oldest and largest outdoor living history museum in the United States. The site includes over 800 structures on more than 300 acres. Collections include archeological material, decorative arts and other cultural heritage items.
For many years, CWF contracted with a pest service company to handle our collections, rodent, stinging insect, and miscellaneous pest problems. Early in 2009 a team was assembled of facilities maintenance, landscape, collections, and finance colleagues to write a request for pricing to renew our contract. We laid out a definition of success - we wanted to prevent harm to people, collections and buildings, use minimal pesticide, and foster a sense of ownership of the IPM program by Foundation employees. Our provider needed to be familiar with the complicated interconnectedness of our collections, architecture, landscape, livestock, commercial, and residential activities.
We recognized that a properly run IPM program, focused on prevention, should reduce typical pest company actions, and that no company planned to work itself out of a job. It became obvious that whoever did this work really should be one of us. We presented this rationale and a remarkably reasonable budget and were allowed to create a job during challenging financial times. Ryan Jones had all of the qualifications, plus he’s a good teacher and learner, a real asset to CW. Since its implementation, our IPM program has not only been successful. Enough efficiency has been realized to expand to include treatment for WDI’s, primarily termites. Preventive activities have paid off. We’ve employed good communication, promoted building fixes and personal responsibility. My time on the program is spent evaluating priorities and backing Ryan up – instead of managing a contract implemented by an outsider.
Ryan inspects all of our monitors or traps and maintains data using Leon Zak's CollectionsPests program. He makes routine building inspections, looking for structural problems that are conducive to pest activity. Work orders are generated to correct these conditions, reducing the need for pesticide applications.
“Eek a mouse, roach, or ant” from a staff member gets an initial response of “clean up the area and we’ll go from there”. Ryan has multiple applicator certifications and because we work closely he can use creative approaches when pesticide application is deemed necessary.

Ryan and a landscape colleague provide annual IPM recertification training for over forty in-house applicators, fulfilling OSHA requirements for use of pesticides by landscape and facilities maintenance staff. During training they emphasize seasonal aspects of pest activity and increase awareness of what is a genuine pest issue. Conservation technicians participate in IPM inspections and practices. They recognize signs of pest activity, understand the rationale of trap and monitor placement, and implement the hygiene piece.
We save time and teach IPM by using info sheets about pests, safety, and IPM aspects of preventive conservation. These are available on our intranet and sent out in response to problems – real or perceived.
This one is often sent out in response to “I found a bug”.
Follow up might be fact sheets like these.
Typically, interpreters and admin staff do not find carpet beetles, our preventive team does. In that case, information is shared with site staff to enlist help and prevent re-infestation. We maintain a segregated space for inspections and treatment of organic collections, materials such as horsehair or feathers, or reproductions susceptible to infestation. When treatment is necessary, we either freeze or use anoxia. Conservation technicians perform most of the treatments, and Colleen Sinnott keeps the stuff flowing efficiently through our “contaminated Holding” room. We get calls from trades and decorating staff regarding pests in dried plants or wood, so we’ve taught them to perform heat and freezing treatments.
We’ve found that visitors are very curious about our pest program. Colleen and I share information about it in regular museum tours.
Even our PR colleagues have become aware of the pest program – this article was on our home web page in conjunction with the IPM conference we had in March.

Keeping colleagues informed about pest problems and prevention has paid dividends. Activities that are kept in the background in many museums have become a point of interest and pride for staff, donors and visitors at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.