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New York City Pest Control Goes “Green” with Groundbreaking Rat Initiative

May 7, 2010—The New York City Health Department has long been hard at work keeping the city streets free of unwanted rodent visitors. Now, it has taken its efforts to the next level through participation in the non-profit IPM Institute of North America, Inc.’s Green Shield Certified program.

Three years ago, the department launched an innovative Rat Indexing Initiative to proactively control urban rodent populations block-by-block while protecting city residents and the environment from potentially harmful pesticides. Now, the program has become the first in the nation to achieve Green Shield Certification. In earning this credential, the Health Department’s Rat Indexing Initiative demonstrates that it meets the requirements of an independent audit and guarantees effective, less toxic pest control.

“Rats are an unfortunate and inevitable part of city life, but we all share responsibility for tackling the problem,” said Dan Kass, Acting Deputy Commissioner for Environmental Health at the NYC Health Department. “We are proud to achieve Green Shield Certification, and look forward to continued community support for our Rat Indexing Initiative.”

First piloted in the Bronx in 2007, the Rat Indexing Initiative uses advanced Integrated Pest Management (IPM) principles paired with hand-held computers and sophisticated mapping technology to tackle the city’s rat population. Trained inspectors conduct block-by-block inspections to provide property owners recommendations for addressing any pest-conducive conditions such as debris, food or water, and comb the area for any signs of rats. Property owners then receive a notice from the agency to correct conditions observed by the inspectors and have up to two weeks to address the issue. If the owner fails

to act or if measures taken are inadequate, the Health Department issues a “Notice of Violation” to the property owner that is adjudicated by the City’s Administrative Tribunal and the Health Department addresses the issue at the cost of the property owner.

Simultaneously, the agency set up a three-day, quarterly Rodent Control Academy to teach pest control professionals and property owners how to effectively and safely control rats. To teach the course, the Health Department enlisted a world-renowned rodent expert Dr. Robert Corrigan. Under Dr. Corrigan’s tutelage, City personnel and private-sector professionals alike learn the nuts and bolts of “green” rodent management. The Rodent Control Academy has helped to create a new generation of proactive pest management professionals in the city who can adopt elements of the Rat Indexing Initiative’s innovative approach in their own practices.

The results of the pilot Rat Indexing Initiative in the Bronx have been positive. From December of 2007 through July of 2009, 29,994 properties in the Bronx were inspected three times by the Health Department; once per each round of the initiative. Infestations declined in every neighborhood inspected and the percentage of infested properties dropped from 10% to 5%, a decrease of 1,460 properties with signs of rats. All results of the Bronx Rat Indexing Initiative are available to the public and can be found online at www.nyc.gov/rats. Due to this success, the Rat Indexing Initiative was expanded to the entire borough of Manhattan in January of 2010, and is expected to cultivate continued community-scale results.

According to Dr. Thomas Green, president of the IPM Institute of North America, Inc., “The New York City Rat Indexing Initiative is truly groundbreaking in its block-by-block approach. The positive results have carefully documented this program’s potential for replication throughout the City, and for other cities nationwide.”

Green Shield Certified is an independent, nonprofit certification program that promotes practitioners of effective, prevention-based pest control while minimizing the need to use pesticides. Green Shield Certified is operated by the IPM Institute of North America, a nonprofit organization recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for its expertise and accomplishments in promoting integrated pest management.

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