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For Your Own Protection

There are worker training standards in place specifically designed to keep you and others safe.

By Ryan Atwood
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Worker Protection Standards, also known as WPS, is required by federal and state law. This is training that must be conducted for employees of a farm, forest, nursery, or greenhouse operation. Golf courses, ranches, and family members are exempt from some of these requirements. Worker protection training is required for workers that come into contact with plant material that has been treated with pesticides. It also is required for workers that apply, mix, load, or come into contact with pesticides in any way.

Training must be conducted for newly hired workers within five days. However, if employees are to handle pesticides, they must be trained before having to work with pesticides. A good rule of thumb is to provide WPS training immediately for new hires. All employees must be trained on WPS principles every five years.

WPS training requires you to cover how to appropriately read pesticide labels, hazards from exposure to pesticides, how pesticides enter the body, signs and symptoms of poisoning, emergency first aid, and how to obtain emergency care. Additional subjects include emergency decontamination, hazards from drift, hazards from con-

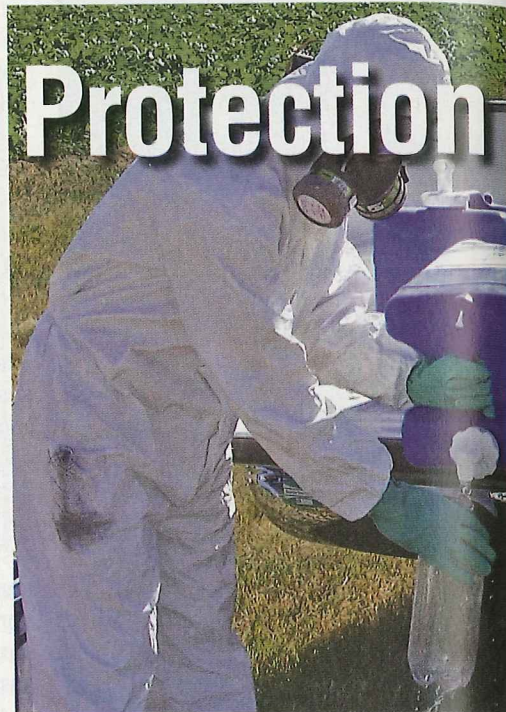


Photo courtesy of Montana State University

taminated clothing, and dangers of taking chemical containers home. In particular, the employees must be informed of the employer's responsibility to ensure worker protection. It is important to emphasize that workers cannot be retaliated against if refusing to do a job under conditions that are not safe. Handlers also must be trained on the environmental aspects of pesticide usage such as drift, runoff, and wildlife hazards. Handler training also must cover topics such as transportation, storage, and disposal of pesticides. Spill cleanup procedures must be covered as well.

Teach And Learn

Who can teach the WPS training? Any licensed pesticide applicators or certified trainers. Trained handlers can teach workers who only come into contact with treated plant material but don't handle pesticides themselves. Employers also are required to have decontamination sites for workers within reasonable access (within 1/4 mile).

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These sites should include one gallon of water, soap, and single-use towels. Anyone who handles pesticides must have immediate access to decontamination items. These items should include 3 gallons of water, soap, single-use towels, and a change of clothes (Tyvek suit works).

Workers handling pesticides must have prompt emergency assistance available. That means the employer, another employee, or ambulance can promptly take a handler for emergency assistance. Emergency information should be posted at a common central location where postings of employee information are made. Other items required at this central posting area include the EPA Worker Protection Poster and the pesticide application list. The pesticide application list should include area, materials, time, date, and restricted entry interval (REI) period. The pesticide application list should be posted prior to any pesticide applications and needs to remain at the central posting for a period of 30 days after application. The central posting area should be in a common area with good visibility and access for employees. Break rooms make good areas for central posting.

Field posting may be required; if it is necessary it will be stated on the label. If field posting is required, signs should be posted at the entrances of treated areas. You should not leave signs up for more than 72 hours after the REI. If signs are permanently left up, they will become ignored and may put workers or visitors in danger. Every

pesticide has an REI, this is the time required before entering a treated area and it will be stated on the label. If there is need to re-enter the area before the REI, then appropriate personal protective equipment must be worn as specified by the label.

When planning on making a pesticide application to a farm, workers must be informed verbally, as well as having a posting at the central location.

In addition, any contract labor, such as scouting companies, need to be informed of applications. Any contractor who applies pesticides must inform the owner of the date, time, materials, and areas treated. Good communication practices can prevent accidents. Your company and employees should have knowledge of proper communication procedures when planning a pesticide application.

Conducting WPS Training

The goal of any trainer for WPS should be to ensure the safety of their workers, while providing the appropriate pesticide information and satisfying the WPS requirements.

The goals of the worker and handlers should be to prevent pesticide exposure and to know what to do if they are exposed. They also should know where to get pesticide information and know what employers must do to protect workers and handlers.

Training can be conducted using oral or written materials. Presentations must be presented in a manner that the audience can understand. As an example, if most of the workers only speak

Spanish, then that is the language in which you would need to convey the worker protection information. You also want to take into account education level and stay away from overly technical phases or terms.

When conducting training, you will need to select a satisfactory location. This requires you to know the number of people for the training so you can ensure there is enough space and materials. The training location should allow for materials to be seen and heard easily. Obviously you want to be familiar with the training material so you can keep the audience's attention. Encourage discussion by asking questions and waiting for worker responses. It can be helpful to use props or have demonstrations to engage the trainees. Training should last between 30 to 45 minutes.

Diligent Documentation

Accurate recordkeeping is very important for documenting WPS training. You should keep a file for each individual with a WPS training program plan. Include agenda, trainer, date, and time for each WPS session conducted. Also, an attendance sheet with each participant should be on file.

The EPA provides free materials for WPS training. Contact your local Extension office for more information on how to obtain these materials or they may be obtained from the IFAS Pesticide Information Office at the University of Florida, Gainesville, 352-392-472.

For more information on WPS requirements, you can refer to the IFAS EDIS publication, "Florida Ag Worker Safety Act"

(<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/PI078>). 

