Personal Protective Equipment for Pesticide Applicators

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Pesticides provide many benefits but can be hazardous if not used safely. We must learn to respect pesticides and the potential problems that can result from applying them in the wrong way. Personal exposure should be a major concern to anyone handling or otherwise coming into contact with pesticides. Consequently, this publication will cover some of the major subjects surrounding exposure to pesticides and how to prevent it.

Symptoms of Poisoning

One hindrance to better protection habits is that pesticide users often do not recognize that they have been poisoned. Often symptoms of pesticide poisoning are much like flu symptoms:

Symptoms of pesticide poisoning:
- nausea
- headache
- dizziness
- chest discomfort
- skin blisters
- diarrhea
- blurred vision.

Symptoms of advanced poisoning:
- vomiting
- difficulty in breathing
- drooling
- pinpoint pupils of eyes
- unconsciousness.

Pesticide Labels and Signal Words

Before opening a pesticide container, carefully read the label. Pesticide product labels have “signal words” that clearly indicate the level of toxicity and the level of risk to the user. The following table lists the three different signal words and what they mean on a pesticide label:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signal Word</th>
<th>Toxicity Class</th>
<th>Toxicity</th>
<th>Approximate Amount Needed to Kill 50% of a Laboratory Population of Test Animals (Mice, Rats, etc. If Taken Orally)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DANGER</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Highly toxic</td>
<td>Taste to 1/8 of an ounce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WARNING</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Moderately toxic</td>
<td>1/8 of an ounce to a little over an ounce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAUTION</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Slightly toxic</td>
<td>A little over an ounce to more than a pint (16 ounces).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAUTION</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Almost nontoxic</td>
<td>Well over a pint (16 ounces).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Routes of Exposure

Pesticide labels describe the pesticides’ routes of entry into your body. Examples are: “Poisonous if swallowed, inhaled, or absorbed through the skin.” Or “rapidly absorbed through the skin and eyes.”

Research has shown that pesticides are absorbed through the skin at different rates on various parts of the body. Special protection should be given to the scalp, ear canal, and forehead areas. The groin area should also be protected. Since hands and forearms are the most likely places of exposure, they should always be protected when handling pesticides. Figure 1 shows different rates of absorption through the skin on different parts of the body.

Personal Protective Equipment

Many different types of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are available through safety supply businesses and catalogs, pesticide dealers, and garden, nursery and forestry supply houses.
Boots
- Select unlined, waterproof boots that reach at least halfway to the knee.
- Do not wear leather or canvas shoes or boots; if a pesticide is spilled or sprayed on these materials, they cannot be thoroughly cleaned. If contaminated shoes or boots become wet, the pesticide(s) can be reactivated.

Headwear
Select a wide-brimmed, waterproof hat that will protect the neck, eyes, mouth, and face. Plastic hard hats with plastic sweatbands are a good choice as they are waterproof. Avoid hats with a cloth or leather sweatband. Cloth or leather sweatbands are difficult or impossible to clean.

Eyewear
Wear protective eyewear when working with dusts, mists, when liquids may splash in your eyes, or when working with pressurized systems.
- Goggles with indirect vents provide better eye protection than safety glasses or face shields.
- Face shields protect the eyes and face from splashes from liquid pesticide formulations and may be worn over goggles for extra protection.
- Safety glasses with side shields and brow guards are recommended for some situations.
- Avoid wearing contact lenses when handling pesticides.

Respirators
The lungs and lining of the respiratory system readily absorb pesticide dusts, mists, and vapors. Respiratory protection is recommended during mixing and loading pesticides, even if not required on the label. Respirator filters either chemically change the pesticide into a harmless form or a solid form that will be trapped inside the filter.

Different cartridges are available to protect against a variety of chemical gases and vapors. Replace the cartridge according to the manufacturer’s recommendations as soon as you begin to smell pesticide coming through the respirator, or if breathing becomes difficult.

Respirator Types:
- Half-mask, Particulate, Disposable — for dusts, pollen, mists, welding fumes, and certain pesticides applied in solid form
- Half-mask, Dual Cartridge, Disposable — for pesticides and ammonia
- Half-mask, Dual Cartridge, Reusable — for variety of contaminants
• Full-face, Dual Cartridge, Reusable — for variety of contaminants
• Air-Purifying with Helmet — for variety of contaminants
• Canister-type Gas Mask — for variety of contaminants
• Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) — used for entry and escape from all atmospheres Immediately Dangerous to Life or Health (IDLH) or oxygen deficient.

When Using a Respirator:
• Be sure you have a tight fit on your face to prevent leaks (facial hair may prevent an adequate fit).
• Dust/mist filtering respirators protect against dusts, powders, mists, and sprays. Look for NIOSH/MSHA approval number prefix TC-21C.
• Vapor-removing respirators protect against gases and vapors. Choose a cartridge approved for organic vapors/pesticides plus a pesticide prefilter, both with NIOSH/MSHA approval number prefix TC-23C, or a canister approved for pesticides/organic vapors with NIOSH/MSHA approval number prefix TC-14G.

Inspecting, Maintaining, and Replacing PPE
PPE should be disposable or sturdy enough to be cleaned for repeated use. To remain effective, PPE must be maintained properly and replaced as necessary.

Disposables
Disposables are PPE items not designed to be cleaned and reused. However, if recommended by the manufacturer, some disposable coveralls can be laundered several times before being discarded. Discard them when they become contaminated with pesticides.

Reusables
Reusables are PPE items designed to be easily cleaned and reused. However, do not reuse items that can no longer provide adequate protection.
• Rubber and plastic suits, gloves, boots, aprons, and headgear should be washed thoroughly between uses. Inspect carefully for holes or thin places.
• Fabric clothing should be cleaned after each day’s use.
• Clothing that is heavily contaminated should be discarded.
• Place items in a labeled plastic bag or hamper away from other personal clothes and away from family laundry.
• Eyewear and respirators should be cleaned after each day’s use. Store where they are protected from dust, sunlight, extreme temperatures, excessive moisture, pesticides, and other chemicals. A zip-closable sturdy plastic bag works well for storage. Check respirator valves for wear and replace them if needed. These items should last many years if they are good quality and maintained correctly.

Washing PPE
Do not allow contaminated or soiled PPE items to be washed with the regular family laundry. It could cause other items to become contaminated. Wear chemically resistant gloves when handling contaminated or soiled PPE.

Boots, helmets, goggles, respirators, and other bulky items can be washed by hand. Other items can be washed as follows:
1. Pre-rinse in a washing machine or by hand.
2. Wash in a washing machine, using a heavy-duty detergent and hot water for the wash cycle.
3. Wash only a few items at a time to allow plenty of agitation and water for dilution. Use the highest water-level setting.
4. Rinse twice using two rinse cycles and warm water.
5. Use two entire machine cycles to wash items that are moderately to heavily contaminated.
6. Run the washer through at least one additional entire cycle without clothing, using detergent and hot water, to clean the machine.

Drying PPE
Hang the items to dry outdoors, if possible, as the sunlight and fresh air will help remove remaining pesticide residues. If it is not possible to air dry, then using a clothes dryer is acceptable for fabric items. However, the dryer can become contaminated with pesticide residues over time.

Avoiding Heat Stress
Heat stress is the illness that occurs when the body builds up more heat than it can cope with. Severe heat stress (heat stroke) can result in death. Signs and symptoms of heat stress may include:
• Fatigue (exhaustion, muscle weakness)
• Headache, nausea, and chills
• Dizziness and fainting
• Loss of coordination
• Severe thirst and dry mouth
• Altered behavior (confusion, slurred speech, quarrelsome or irrational attitude).

Anyone showing signs and symptoms of heat stress should be treated immediately.

Heat stress is not caused by exposure to pesticides, but may affect pesticide handlers who are working in hot conditions. Wearing PPE can increase the risk of heat stress by limiting the body’s ability to
cool down. The following suggestions can help reduce the chance of heat stress:

• Don’t wear extra PPE if you don’t need it! Use the minimum amount of PPE that will provide adequate protection.
• Select the coolest PPE required for the job — woven fabrics (cotton, cotton/polyester) allow air to pass through fairly easily. Some recently developed disposable garments also provide some ventilation.
• During heat stress conditions drink plenty of water before, during, and after work — don’t rely on thirst as an indicator of how much fluid your body needs.
• Work during the coolest times of day (if possible).
• Use work/rest cycles — take frequent breaks.

Additional Information
Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service
Publications
(contact your local county Extension office)
PAT 2 — Kentucky’s Pesticide Applicator Training and Certification Program

PESTICIDE EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Pesticide Spills

If you have a pesticide spill and need information on how to handle this type of emergency, call: 911
Kentucky Environmental Response — (800) 928-2380
CHEMTREC Pesticide Emergency Hotline (24 hour) — (800) 424-9300
Disaster Emergency Service (24 hour);
State Coordinating Agency for Disasters and Emergencies — (502) 564-7815
Division of Pesticides, Kentucky Department of Agriculture — (502) 564-7274
Kentucky Department of Human Resources — (502) 564-4537

Pesticide Exposures

If you have a person who has been exposed to a particular pesticide, provide your physician or emergency room with these emergency numbers, designed to provide pharmacological information on pesticides to health professionals:
The Kentucky Regional Poison Center of Kosair Children’s Hospital — (800) 722-5725
In Metro Louisville call — 589-8222
National Pesticide Clearinghouse — (800) 858-PEST (7378)
Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center
School of Medicine
Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health
Lubbock, TX 79430

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