



The Worker Protection Standard

For the Use of Agricultural Pesticides on Farms

The Worker Protection Standard (WPS) is a set of regulations from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designed to protect agricultural workers from pesticide exposure. In North Carolina, this regulation is enforced by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) through its inclusion in the N. C. Pesticide Law of 1971. It must be followed when pesticide use is part of the production of agricultural plants on a farm or in a forest, nursery, or greenhouse. People who violate the WPS may be fined and/or have their pesticide applicator certification suspended or revoked.

How does WPS apply to farmers?

Farmers and their immediate families must comply with certain provisions of the WPS while performing tasks related to the production of agricultural plants on their own establishment. Farmers who employ nonfamily members must follow all WPS requirements.

For details about WPS regulations, see the EPA's 141-page manual, *The Worker Protection Standard for Agricultural Pesticides—How to Comply: What Employers Need to Know*. It is available free at any N. C. Cooperative Extension Service Center. Additional information is available through the Pesticide Section of the NCDA&CS at 919/733-3556.

When must you follow the WPS?

To see whether you must follow WPS for a particular pesticide, check the "Agricultural Use Requirements" section on each pesticide label. The WPS does not apply when pesticides are used on pastures; to control rodents; as bait in traps; on harvested plants; for public pest control; on livestock; on home fruit, vegetable gardens, or lawns; and for non-crop areas such as roads.

This publication highlights WPS requirements for farmers who fall into one of two categories—those who do not employ people outside their immediate family, and those who do. It is intended for a general farm audience and can be used only as a basic guide to some of the requirements of the WPS. Omissions or oversights in this publication do not exempt people from complying with the WPS.

How much do you know?

- 1) Farmers are exempt from all provisions of the Worker Protection Standard. True or false?
- 2) All fields treated with pesticides must be posted with an approved sign. True or false?
- 3) Decontamination sites for workers must have:
 - a) Enough water for routine use and emergency eye flushing.
 - b) Plenty of soap.
 - c) Single-use towels.
 - d) All of the above.
- 4) Farmers who employ people other than their immediate family must keep information on all pesticides applied within the last 30 days at a central location. True or false?
- 5) Decontamination sites must be available for workers for at least 30 days after pesticides have been applied. True or false?

(See back page for answers.)

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Farmers and Their Immediate Families

Farmers and their immediate family members must comply with only four sections of the WPS: the employer information exchange, restrictions during handling tasks, and restrictions during and immediately after application.

Information exchange

This section requires farmers to provide the following information to the employer of any custom applicator or crop consultant they hire:

- Specific location and description of all areas being treated with a pesticide within a quarter-mile of where the custom applicator or consultant will be working.
- Specific location and description of all areas under “Restricted Entry Interval” (REI) within a quarter-mile of where the custom applicator or consultant will be working.
- Any restrictions for entering areas under application or REI.

In return, the employer of the custom applicator must provide farmers with the following information before applying pesticides on the farm:

- Location and description of area to be treated.
- Time and date of application.
- Product name, EPA registration number, and active ingredient(s).
- The pesticide’s REI.
- Whether the product label requires verbal and posted warnings after application.
- Any other specific requirements on the product label concerning protection of workers and others during or after application.

Restrictions during handling

Farmers must use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other work clothing listed on the pesticide label. Requirements vary, depending upon the toxicity of the pesticide and the handling activity.

Restrictions during application

Farmers must make sure that each pesticide is applied so that it does not contact, either directly or through drift, anyone except appropriately trained and equipped handlers. They also must make sure that all people, except appropriately trained and equipped handlers, are kept out of areas being treated with pesticides.

Restrictions after application

Farmers must be sure that all individuals except trained and equipped handlers are kept out of areas that are under REI, generally between 4 and 48 hours. When two or more pesticides with different REIs are applied at the same time, the longer interval must be followed. If the field must be entered before the REI expires, the trained worker must be provided with PPE, and entry time must not exceed 8 hours in a 24 hour period of the REI.



Definitions

Agricultural establishment

Any farm, forest, nursery, or greenhouse.

Commercial pesticide handling establishment

A business that employs pesticide (custom) applicators or crop advisors to perform tasks or apply pesticides on an agricultural establishment.

Immediate family

This includes the spouse, children, stepchildren, foster children, parents, stepparents, foster parents, brothers, sisters, and in-laws of a farmer.

Restricted Entry Interval (REI)

The waiting period after a pesticide has been applied, usually between 4 and 48 hours, during which entry into the treated area generally is prohibited.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Clothing and other equipment such as goggles, chemically resistant gloves, boots, aprons, coveralls, and respirators, that provide protection from exposure to pesticides.

Handler(s)

A self-employed individual (farmer) or individuals employed at farms to mix, load, transfer, or apply pesticides or do other tasks that bring them into direct contact with pesticides. Farmers must provide a certain level of protection for the nonfamily handlers they employ.

Worker(s)

A self-employed individual (farmer) or individuals employed to do tasks involved in agricultural production, such as weeding, planting, cultivating, detasseling, and harvesting. Farmers must provide a certain level of protection for the nonfamily workers they employ. Note: By definition, “workers” do not apply pesticides or handle pesticide containers or equipment. However, someone may be a “worker” while completing one task and a “handler” while completing a different task.

Farmers with Nonfamily Employees

Farmers who employ people outside their immediate family must follow a number of WPS requirements **in addition to the requirements that apply to farmers and members of their immediate family.** Farmer-employers must provide a certain level of protection for workers and handlers.

Workers and Handlers

Information at central location

Farmers must display the following information whenever pesticide handlers or workers are on the farm and for 30 days after an REI has expired:

- A list of dates and times that pesticides have been applied within the last 30 days, including a description of each treated area, and the product name, EPA registration number, active ingredient(s), and REI for each pesticide on that list.
- An approved EPA safety poster that shows how to keep pesticides from getting on or entering the body, and information about how to clean up if a person comes in contact with pesticides.
- Emergency information, including the name, address, and telephone number of the nearest emergency medical care facility.

Emergency assistance

Farmers must be able to provide emergency assistance for nonfamily handlers and workers injured as a result of exposure to pesticides. This includes transportation to the nearest medical care facility and information about the pesticide product. The farmer must be able to provide emergency personnel with this information:

- Product name, EPA registration number, active ingredient(s) in the pesticide.
- First aid and medical information on the product label.
- Description of how the pesticide was used.
- Details about the victim's exposure.

Decontamination supplies

Farmers must provide decontamination supplies within a quarter mile of where workers or handlers are working. These supplies must be available during application and for at least 30 days after the REI has expired. The supplies include:

- Water for routine washing and eye flushing and for emergency whole-body washing (pesticide handlers only).
- Plenty of soap.
- Single-use towels.
- Clean coveralls (pesticide handlers only).

The same supplies must be available where pesticides are mixed or loaded. Handlers must have a least one pint of water immediately available for flushing eyes. To avoid contamination, these supplies should not be brought into a pesticide treated area, or, if so, they must be kept in enclosed containers.

Pesticide safety training

Before a worker or handler enters a field that has been treated within the last 30 days or for which an REI has been in effect, the farmer must provide the safety information as illustrated on the EPA-approved WPS safety poster. This poster is available free at any Cooperative Extension Service Center. Complete WPS safety training must be given before the sixth day that an employee enters any areas on the agricultural establishment. This training requirement is met if the worker or handler is currently certified as a private or commercial pesticide applicator in N.C. If not, any N.C. certified pesticide applicator may conduct training for workers and handlers in his employ. EPA-approved training guides and materials are available by contacting the Cooperative Extension Service or the NCDA&CS Pesticide Section at 919/733-3556.

Requirements for Workers Only

Notification

Before a pesticide is applied, farmers may be required to post a warning sign at entrances to the target area and/or give oral notification of the planned application. Refer to the Agricultural Use Requirement Section on the pesticide label for specific information.

Early entry

Farmers must make sure that workers are not allowed or directed to enter a treated area during a pesticide application or before the REI has expired, except under early-entry situations. Early entry means entry by a worker into a treated area before the REI expires. Workers must receive complete WPS training, instruction on proper use of PPE, and pesticide labeling information before early entry is permitted. Note: No entry is allowed during the first four hours following an application of any agricultural pesticide.



When specified on the label, this warning sign is required at entrances to treated areas and is available free from the EPA Center for Environmental Publications, 1-800-490-9198. Ask for EPA#735-H-94-001.

Requirements for Handlers Only

Farmers must closely monitor handlers, make sure they receive specific instructions about their task, and provide and maintain pesticide handling equipment and protective clothing or gear:

Monitoring

Farm employers must be sure that handlers apply a pesticide so that it does not contact, either directly or through drift, anyone except those who are properly trained and equipped. Farm employers also must make sight or voice contact at least every two hours with anyone who handles pesticides that have a cautionary skull and crossbones symbol on the label.

Specific instructions

Before pesticide handlers begin any tasks, they must receive the following information:

- Instructions regarding the safe use of the pesticide, given in a manner that the employee can understand.
- Where to find the product label while handling the product.
- Instructions for operating pesticide handling equipment, such as sprayers.

Pesticide handling equipment

Farm employers must make sure that equipment used for mixing, loading, transferring, or applying pesticides is in good condition. Specifically:

- Pesticide handling equipment should be inspected before each use, with repairs or replacements made as needed.
- Employers should allow only appropriately trained and equipped handlers to repair, clean, or adjust pesticide equipment that contains pesticides or residues. (Service repairmen who are not farm employees must be alerted that the equipment may be contaminated with pesticides.)

Personal protective equipment

Farm employers also must provide employees with all PPE listed on the label and follow certain safety practices:

- All PPE should be clean and in operating condition, worn and used correctly, inspected before each day of use, and repaired or replaced as needed.
- All respirators should fit correctly. Dust/mist filters and vapor-removing cartridges or canisters must be replaced as recommended on the label or at the end of the day's work period, if no other instructions or indications of service life are available.
- Handlers should be informed about symptoms of heat illness that can occur when wearing PPE, and the employer must take necessary steps to prevent heat illness.
- Handlers must be provided with a pesticide-free area to store personal clothing when not in use and where they may put on and take off PPE before and after use.
- Farm employers should not allow contaminated PPE to be worn or taken home.
- Farm employers must inform people who clean or launder PPE that the equipment or clothes may be contaminated with pesticides, which could lead to potentially harmful effects from exposure. Farm employers should advise them about ways to protect themselves when handling equipment and about proper ways to clean it.
- If PPE will be reused, farm employers are responsible for having it cleaned and dried before each day of use, according to instructions from the manufacturer. If instructions are not listed on either the pesticide product label or by the PPE manufacturer, the equipment should be washed in detergent and hot water. If possible, PPE should be line dried.
- Coveralls contaminated with an undiluted pesticide of the type that carries a DANGER or WARNING signal word must be discarded.

The Worker Protection Standard—*What can you do?*

The WPS outlines good safety practices for all farmers who use pesticides in their operations. Even if compliance is not required, consider using the WPS as a guide to develop your own safe practices and habits.

- Think about the pesticides you use, when each is used, who applies them, or who might come into contact with them, either directly or indirectly.
- Get a copy of the EPA's *How to Comply Manual* at your Cooperative Extension Service Center. Read the manual and mark sections that apply to your operation.
- Always read the pesticide label and follow precautionary statements carefully. Remember, the label is the law.

Answers to quiz: 1—False; 2—False; 3—d; 4—True; 5—True



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