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## Safe Farm: The Worker Protection Standard: Rules to improve pesticide safety

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## The Worker Protection Standard: Rules to improve pesticide safety

The Worker Protection Standard (WPS) is a recent set of regulations from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) designed to protect agricultural workers from pesticide exposure. It must be followed when pesticide use is part of the production of agricultural plants on a farm, forest, nursery, or greenhouse.

### How does WPS apply to farmers?

Farmers and their immediate families are exempt from many WPS requirements but they must follow pesticide label directions and provide some of the label information to people they contract for services. Farmers who employ nonfamily members must follow additional WPS requirements, such as providing clean-up areas and restricting access to fields after pesticides have been applied. Other sections of the standard apply to ag dealerships, commercial applicators, crop advisors, and seasonal operations such as detasslers and bean walkers.

The complete WPS regulations are detailed in the EPA's *How to Comply* manual (see next page for information about ordering the manual). Even though an operation may be exempt from the WPS, the standard outlines good safety practices for all farmers who use pesticides in their operation.

### When must you follow WPS?

To see whether you must follow WPS for a particular pesticide, check the "Directions for Use" section on each product label for the WPS statement. This includes

general-use and restricted-use pesticides applied directly on plants or in the soil. 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.

### Are there revisions?

The WPS regulations went into effect January 1, 1995. The EPA made five revisions in May 1995. They include:

- a shorter restricted entry interval (REI) for low-risk pesticides (reduced to four hours, noted on the label);
- employers given five days to provide complete WPS safety training if they give workers basic pesticide safety instructions before entering a treated area;
- workers allowed to enter pesticide-treated areas during the REI as long as there is "limited contact" with treated surfaces, they are provided personal protective equipment (PPE), and entry is limited to 8 hours out of 24;
- irrigation workers also allowed entry during the REI if "limited contact," and
- certified or licensed crop advisors can enter treated areas if they've had approved safety training.

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.

## The Worker Protection Standard

### 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 for 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 in a central location of all pesticides applied within the last 30 days. 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.

# Farmers and immediate families

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

## Definitions

### Ag establishment

Any farm, forest, nursery or greenhouse. The WPS applies to owners or managers of ag establishments that employ people who may come in contact with pesticides.

### Commercial pesticide handling establishment

An ag dealership that employs individuals to apply pesticides on farms. Farmers must provide certain information to employers at commercial handling establishments.

### Immediate family

This includes the spouse, children, stepchildren, foster children, parents, stepparents, foster parents, brothers, sisters, and in-laws. Farmers and members of their immediate family are exempt from many WPS requirements.

### Restricted Entry Interval (REI)

The waiting period after a pesticide has been applied, generally between 4 and 72 hours, during which entry is restricted.

### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

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

### Information exchange

This section requires farmers to provide the following information to any commercial pesticide applicator employer 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 REI within a quarter-mile of where the custom applicator or consultant will be working, and
- any restrictions for entering areas under application or REI.

In return, 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, and
- any other specific requirements on the product label concerning protection of workers and others during or after application.

### Restrictions during handling

Farmers must use PPE and other work clothing listed on the pesticide label. Requirements vary, depending upon the toxicity of the pesticide and the handling activity. Appropriate PPE could include goggles, chemically-resistant gloves, boots, or aprons, coveralls, and respirators.

### 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 correctly trained and equipped handlers are kept out of areas that are under REI, generally between 4 and 72 hours. When two or more pesticides with different REI are applied at the same time, the longer interval must be followed. If the field must be entered before the REI expires, people must wear appropriate PPE and comply with other restrictions.

## For more information

For details about WPS regulations, see the EPA's 141-page manual, *The WPS for Agricultural Pesticides—How to Comply: What Employers Need to Know*. It is available free at any Iowa State University Extension office. Ask for PAT-12. For additional information about WPS revisions described on page 1, contact the Pesticide Bureau at (515) 281-8591.

For more information about WPS training or PPE in general, request

these free publications from your county extension office:

- *Protect Yourself from Pesticides: Guide for Agricultural Workers*, PAT-16;
- *Protect Yourself from Pesticides: Guide for Pesticide Handlers*, PAT-17;
- *A Guide to Heat Stress in Agriculture*, PAT-20;
- *Learn about Pesticides and Clothes*, Pm-1265f;
- *Keep Gloves Handy for Pesticide Work*, Pm-1518e, and
- *Cover Up with Coveralls and Aprons*, Pm-1563a.

# 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. Farm employers must provide certain protection for workers and handlers, some only to workers, and some only to 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 the REI has expired:

- 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 you come in contact with pesticides;
- emergency information, including the name, address and telephone number of the nearest emergency medical care facility, and
- 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.

### Emergency assistance

Farmers must be able to provide emergency assistance for nonfamily handlers and workers involved in a pesticide accident. 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, and
- details about the victim's exposure.

## Workers only

Farmers must make sure that workers are not allowed to remain in, or be directed to enter a treated area during application or before the REI has expired except under "limited contact" provisions. Farmers must notify all workers who will be within a quarter-mile of a field during application or when the REI is in effect. In some cases, farmers may be required to post a treated field in addition to oral notification.

### Decontamination areas

Farmers must provide decontamination areas within a quarter-mile of where people are working or handling pesticides. These areas must be provided during application and for at least 30 days after the REI has expired. These areas must include:

- water for routine washing and eye flushing; and for emergency whole-body washing (pesticide handlers only);
- plenty of soap;
- single-use towels, and
- clean coveralls (pesticide handlers only).

The same supplies must be available where pesticide handlers clean up after application and where they mix or load pesticides. Handlers also must have at least one pint of water immediately available for flushing eyes. To avoid contamination, all supplies must be kept in enclosed containers in areas where pesticides are being applied.

### Pesticide safety training

Farmers must provide training for pesticide handlers and workers. This requirement is met if the worker or handler is currently certified as a private or commercial pesticide applicator. If not, any certified applicator may conduct worker or handler training. Individuals who have attended train-the-trainer programs also may conduct training.

## Handlers only

Farmers must closely monitor handlers, make sure they receive specific instructions about their tasks, and provide and care for pesticide handling equipment and protective clothing or gear. The following sections apply:

### Monitoring

Farm employers must be sure that all (continued on back page)

## Definitions

### Handlers

Individuals employed by farms to mix, load, transfer or apply pesticides, or do other tasks that bring them into direct contact with pesticides. Farmers must provide certain protection for nonfamily handlers they employ.

### Workers

Individuals employed to do tasks involved in ag production, such as weeding, planting, cultivating, detasseling and harvesting. Farmers must provide certain protection for nonfamily workers they employ.

### Note:

By definition, "workers" do not apply pesticides or handle pesticide containers or equipment. Someone may be a "worker" while completing one task and a "handler" while completing a different task.

## Handlers only (continued)

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 with a skull and crossbones on the label.

### Specific instructions

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

- instructions regarding the safe use of the pesticide, given in a manner in which the employee can understand;
- where to find the product label while handling the product, and
- 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, and
- employers can allow only appropriately trained and equipped handlers to repair, clean, or adjust pesticide equipment that contains pesticides or residues.

### 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.
- Handlers should be informed about symptoms of heat illness that can occur when wearing PPE, and encouraged to avoid them.
- Handlers must be provided with a pesticide-free area to store personal clothing when not in use, and to put on and take off PPE before and after use.
- Farm employers should not allow contaminated PPE to be worn or taken home. It also should be stored and washed separately from other laundry.
- Farm employers must inform people who clean or launder PPE that the equipment or clothes may be contaminated with pesticides, which could result in potentially harmful effects of exposure, and 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 to have it clean and dry before each day of reuse, 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.
- Coveralls contaminated with undiluted pesticide with a DANGER or WARNING signal word must be discarded.

## Enforcement and penalties

In Iowa, the Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship's Pesticide Bureau is charged with enforcing the new regulations. If a person is found to be in violation, the case may be referred to the EPA and the EPA can levy a fine. In addition, employers who fail to provide WPS protections for employees may be liable in civil court.

This publication is intended for a general farm audience and can be used only as a general guide to some of the requirements

under the Worker Protection Standard. Omissions or oversights in this publication do not exempt people from complying with the standard. For details, consult the EPA's *How to Comply* manual or contact the local ISU Extension office. You also may call the Pesticide Bureau in Des Moines at (515) 281-8591.

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## 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 might come in direct or indirect contact with them.
- Get a copy of the EPA's *How to Comply* manual at your local extension office. Read the manual and mark sections that apply to your operation.
- Always read the pesticide label and follow precautionary statements carefully.

And remember, the label is the law.

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

## Safe Farm



Safe Farm is an Iowa State University Extension project helping to make Iowa farms a safer place to work and live.

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