



Pesticide Basics

Workers at risk of pesticide exposure include agricultural workers, grounds keepers, pet groomers, fumigators and landscape workers.

Working Safely

Never assume a pesticide is harmless (the suffix “-cide” means “to kill”).

- Appropriate personal protective clothing is vital to minimize exposure to pesticides. Rubber gloves, closed shoes and socks, long-sleeved shirts, long pants, splash-proof safety goggles and masks may be recommended; check the product label.
- Wash before eating, drinking, using chewing gum or tobacco or using the toilet. Shower after work (including washing your hair) and put on clean clothes. Wash your work clothes separately. Employers must provide an area and water for workers to wash off and be decontaminated if they are exposed.
- Never smoke or eat while mixing or applying pesticides.
- Never apply pesticides on a windy day, as winds higher than 10 miles per hour can carry chemicals into areas where they might harm (drift). If there is a light breeze, position yourself so pesticide spray or dust is not blowing into your face.
- Store and dispose of pesticides according to the product directions and in line with local or state regulations. Never dispose of unused pesticides by throwing down a sink, into a toilet or down a sewer or street drain.

In medical emergencies, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires employers to provide:

- Name and location of the nearest medical facility
- A ride to a medical facility
- Info about the pesticide(s) involved in the accident, including a Safety Data Sheet (OSHA 1910.1200)

Signs of Poisoning

When working with pesticides, the risk of coming in contact with an external irritant is high. Wash immediately in clean water if pesticides are sprayed or spilled on you. Do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth with your hands; they might be contaminated. If signs of illness develop, medical help should be sought immediately to determine if the symptoms are pesticide related. In some instances, blood or urine should be collected for analysis.

In a pesticide poisoning emergency, give first aid immediately, then call 9-1-1, a poison control center or the National Pesticide Information Center, 800.858.7378.

Signs of External Irritants Include:

- Skin damage such as redness, itching or pimples
- Allergic skin reactions such as redness or swelling
- Stinging or swelling of the mucous membranes
- Internal injuries may occur if pesticides are accidentally swallowed, inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

Signs of Internal Injuries Include:

- Shortness of breath, chest burning, drooling
- Nausea, vomiting, cramps or diarrhea
- Excessive fatigue, headache, muscle spasms, numbness

Sources: Environmental Protection Agency, Occupational Safety & Health Administration

Safety tips developed based on generally accepted safety standards believed to be reliable at the date of publication. Information is for general guidance only and should not be relied upon for legal compliance purposes.

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