

Worker Protection Standards for Agricultural Pesticides

EPA's Worker Protection Standard for Agricultural Pesticides (WPS) is a regulation aimed at reducing the risk of pesticide poisonings and injuries among agricultural workers and pesticide handlers. The WPS offers protections to approximately 2.5 million agricultural workers (people involved in the production of agricultural plants) and pesticide handlers (people who mix, load, or apply pesticides) that work at over 600,000 agricultural establishments. The WPS contains requirements for pesticide safety training, notification of pesticide applications, use of personal protective equipment, restricted-entry intervals after pesticide application, decontamination supplies, and emergency medical assistance.

Who and What Are Covered?

The Worker Protection Standard (WPS) protects employees on farms, forests, nurseries, and greenhouses from occupational exposure to agricultural pesticides. The regulation covers two types of employees:

- **Pesticide handlers** -- those who mix, load, or apply agricultural pesticides; clean or repair pesticide application equipment; or assist with the application of pesticides in any way.
- **Agricultural workers** -- those who perform tasks related to the cultivation and harvesting of plants on farms or in greenhouses, nurseries, or forests. Workers include anyone employed for any type of compensation (including self-employed) doing tasks -- such as carrying nursery stock, repotting plants, or watering -- related to the production of agricultural plants on an agricultural establishment. Workers do **not** include such employees as office employees, truck drivers, mechanics, and any other workers not engaged in worker or handler activities.

In addition, there are some WPS requirements that apply to all persons and some that apply to anyone who handles pesticide application equipment or cleans or launders pesticide-contaminated personal protective equipment.

The WPS **does not apply** when pesticides are applied on an agricultural establishment in the following circumstances:

- For mosquito abatement, Mediterranean fruit fly eradication, or similar wide-area public pest control programs sponsored by governmental entities. The WPS does apply to cooperative programs in which the growers themselves make or arrange for pesticide applications.
- On livestock or other animals, or in or about animal premises.
- On plants grown for other than commercial or research purposes, which may include plants in habitations, home fruit and vegetable gardens, and home greenhouses.
- On plants that are in ornamental gardens, parks, and public or private lawns and grounds that are intended only for aesthetic purposes or climatic modification.

- By injection directly into agricultural plants. Direct injection does not include "hack and squirt," "frill and spray," chemigation, soil-incorporation, or soil-injection.
- In a manner not directly related to the production of agricultural plants, such as structural pest control, control of vegetation along rights-of-way and in other noncrop areas, and pasture and rangeland use.
- For control of vertebrate pests.
- As attractants or repellents in traps.
- On the harvested portions of agricultural plants or on harvested timber.
- For research uses of unregistered pesticides.

Summary of WPS Requirements

Protection during applications -- Applicators are prohibited from applying a pesticide in a way that will expose workers or other persons. Workers are excluded from areas while pesticides are being applied.

Restricted-entry intervals -- Restricted-entry intervals must be specified on all agricultural plant pesticide product labels. Workers are excluded from entering a pesticide-treated area during the restricted-entry interval, with only narrow exceptions.

Personal protective equipment -- Personal protective equipment must be provided and maintained for handlers and early-entry workers.

Notification to workers -- Workers must be notified about treated areas so they may avoid inadvertent exposures.

Decontamination supplies -- Handlers and workers must have an ample supply of water, soap, and towels for routine washing and emergency decontamination.

Emergency assistance -- Transportation must be made available to a medical care facility if a worker or handler may have been poisoned or injured. Information must be provided about the pesticide to which the person may have been exposed.

Pesticide safety training and safety posters -- Training is required for all workers and handlers, and a pesticide safety poster must be displayed.

Access to labeling and site-specific information -- Handlers and workers must be informed of pesticide label requirements. Central posting of recent pesticide applications is required.