

# Reducing Take-Home Pesticide Exposures

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Pesticide safety is crucial since pesticides can easily cause ill health effects by entering the human body through your skin, mouth or respiratory system. There are many basic practices that must be followed to reduce pesticide exposure while handling and making applications. You also have to be aware of steps you can take to reduce take-home exposures which could contaminate your home and put you and your family at risk. This article will cover the importance of wearing proper protective clothing while handling pesticides and proper decontamination and laundering of pesticide contaminated clothing (PCC).

## Protective Clothing

First and foremost, protective clothing must be used while handling pesticides. Before using any pesticide take the time to read the label and the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) for that product. The product label and MSDS will tell you what personal protective equipment (PPE) needs to be worn when handling that material. The label and MSDS will also list emergency first aid procedures that should be followed if there is an inadvertent exposure. You need to be familiar with first aid procedures before you handle the product. Protective clothing includes disposable, water repellent coveralls made of Tyvek® or a similar material. For some products, half-face or full-face respirators may need to be worn. Additionally, waterproof, chemical-resistant gloves should always be worn while handling pesticides. The area where the suit and the gloves meet should be sealed with tape to prevent contamination. An added layer of protection can be achieved by applying water/soil repellent to work clothes that are worn under the coveralls. Repellents include products such as Scotchguard® Fabric Protector or Zepel® Water Repellent aerosols. If repellents are used it is necessary for them to be reapplied after each laundering.

Here is a list of steps for handling and decontaminating PCC:

- Always wear waterproof, chemical-resistant gloves when handling PCC. Use these gloves for this purpose only. Wash the gloves thoroughly before removing them. Check the label and MSDS for type of gloves to be worn.
- Pre-rinse PCC (hose off outdoors or rinse in tub/pail)
- Remove PCC at the work site. This should be done as soon as possible after the application is completed.
- If using granular pesticides, shake clothing and empty pockets / cuffs outdoors
- After removing PCC, place them in a sealed plastic bag.
- Separate clothing contaminated with the same pesticide. Plastic lined boxes can be used to group the clothing according to pesticide.
- Immediately wash hands, face, neck, and forearms with soap and water. Take a shower as soon as possible. Put on clean clothes.
- Properly dispose of clothing that is too heavily saturated to decontaminate.

- Do not wear leather while handling pesticides (boots, watchbands, decorative elements, inner bands of caps, etc). Leather cannot be decontaminated and must be thrown away.

### **Laundering Protective Clothing**

Proper laundering of PPC will reduce further contamination. It is especially important to reduce take-home pesticides because children are at greater risk for pesticide contamination. Before laundering PCC it is important to read the pesticide label. Pesticide companies are required to include instructions for laundering clothing contaminated with each type of pesticide. The following is a list of simple steps on how to launder PCC:

- Pre-treat PCC with heavy duty liquid detergent.
- Wash PCC separately from the family wash.
- Wash PCC contaminated with the same pesticide together.
- Do not overload the washer and wash only a few garments at a time.
- Use the most water possible.
- Use the hottest water possible (140° or higher).
- Use normal 12-minute or longer wash cycle with double rinse.
- Use the amount of detergent recommended or more for heavy soil or hard water.
- Do not use bleach or ammonia
- Line dry laundered clothing away from children / pets. Do not use a dryer.
- Repeat this laundry procedure 2-3 times
- After laundering the PCC run an empty wash cycle with warm water / detergent to decontaminate the machine.
- Launder the clothing the same day it is contaminated. This will allow for easier residue removal.
- If the clothing cannot be laundered immediately, hang it in a safe area away from family and pets. Exposing the PCC to air and sunlight will help the pesticides break down and cause less contamination.
- Designate certain clothing to be worn when handling pesticides.
- Keep this set of clothing separate from other clothing both before and after laundering.
- Do not dry clean PCC.
- Do not wash PCC in a public laundromat.

Following these procedures outlined here will help reduce you and your family's exposure to pesticides. Keep emergency numbers posted near telephones. Important telephone numbers to keep on hand in case of an emergency include:

- CHEMTREC (emergency responder information on pesticide spills and accidents) 800-424-9300
- The National Pesticide Information Center 800-858-7378
- Poison Control Centers 800-222-1222.

If you need further information on reducing take-home pesticide exposures, contact Jim Carrabba, Agricultural Safety Specialist at (800) 343-7527 ext. 239, or e-mail at [jcarrabba@nycamh.com](mailto:jcarrabba@nycamh.com). You can also call this number to schedule an on-farm safety training session, or a farm safety survey. We wish you the best of luck this season and we hope that you have a safe growing season this year. NYCAMH, a program of Bassett Healthcare Network, is enhancing agricultural and rural health by preventing and treating occupational injury and illness.