

The Worker Protection Standard: Protecting Workers from Pesticide Exposures

By James Carrabba

The New York Center for Agricultural Medicine & Health – NYCAMH

The Worker Protection Standard (WPS) is an important regulation that is in place to protect workers from exposures to agricultural pesticides. This regulation was issued in 1992 and is administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The WPS requires that farmers take specific steps that reduce the risk of pesticide exposure. According to the EPA, WPS regulations offer protection to approximately 2.5 million 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 businesses. WPS has no small farm exemption or exemptions based on a minimum number of farm employees. Under WPS guidelines, any farm that uses pesticides, or employs workers or pesticide handlers that use pesticides must provide employees with the following safeguards:

- Pesticide application notices must be posted in a central location. Warning signs must be posted on treated areas. Restricted entry intervals (REI's) for pesticides must be communicated to workers.
- Pesticide safety training for workers and/or handlers must be provided.
- Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) must be provided.

WPS Central Posting Area

Under this regulation each farm needs to have posting location that is easily seen and that workers have easy access to. Employers need to ensure that workers know where the central posting area is and what information is posted there. The WPS specifically states the type of information that needs to be posted. The required information includes:

- The EPA WPS safety poster
- Name, address, and telephone number of the nearest medical facility
- Important facts about pesticide applications. This is posted before the application is made and until 30 days after the restricted entry interval (REI) has ended. This includes:
 - Product name, EPA registration number, and active ingredients
 - Location and description of treated area
 - Time and date of application, and the REI

Employers need to keep this information up to date and posted legibly. Employers should also verbally inform employees about pesticide applications and REI's.

Pesticide Safety Training

Both pesticide handlers and workers are required to have pesticide safety training. Unless the workers possess a valid EPA WPS training card, both workers and handlers must be trained before they begin work and at least once every 5 years. Workers can be issued the blue WPS training card and handlers will have the green WPS training card. Both cards will have an expiration date written on them. The pesticide safety training is

based on the WPS pesticide safety educational materials which are available for both workers and handlers. These training materials must be used for the safety training and they contain specific topics which must be covered in the training sessions. The training can be delivered with written or audiovisual materials. A certified pesticide applicator must deliver the training.

Personal Protective Equipment

Employers need to provide handlers with the type of PPE specified by the pesticide label. Respirators need to fit each handler correctly. Employers need to provide a pesticide-free area for workers to keep their personal clothing and to put on and remove PPE.

Employers must also ensure that PPE is:

- Clean and in operating condition
- Worn and used correctly
- Inspected before each use
- Repaired or replaced as needed

Even though WPS regulations only require pesticide safety training once every 5 years, NYCAMH recommends that employers provide this training on an annual basis.

Through a grant from the New York State Department of Labor Hazard Abatement Board, NYCAMH can provide WPS safety training at no cost to agricultural operations in New York. If you would like to schedule an on-farm safety training session, or a farm safety survey contact me at 800-343-7527, ext 239 or e-mail jcarrabba@nycamh.com. Some of the safety training topics we typically offer include: ladder safety, safe lifting & carrying, forklift safety, tractor safety, processing line safety, and personal hygiene. NYCAMH, a program of Bassett Healthcare Network, is enhancing agricultural and rural health by preventing and treating occupational injury and illness.