

Understanding Product Labels *Reviewing Labels Improves Product Performance*

By DAVID OBERLE

BASF Turf and Ornamental Sales Representative



It happens all the time. Someone buys a new herbicide, fungicide or insecticide, skims through the product label and files it away until it's time to use the product. When that time comes, he or she flips to the portion of the label that shows the recommended rates. No big deal, right?

Beyond the date of purchase, most people don't spend a lot of time reading product labels. Familiarizing yourself with a label when you buy the product is a good



idea, but so is re-reading the label before putting the product to use. Doing so can save a lot of time, money and hassle.

Most people using fungicides, herbicides and insecticides only ask themselves, "What product do I need to control the weed, insect or disease that's causing me a problem and what rate do I need to use?" Rate information is essential, but product labels provide a lot of other important information. Here are five key things to look for on product labels:

Tank Mixing

Most labels have a tank mixing section, which includes what you can and cannot

tank mix with a particular product. Using several products in one application is a common practice in the industry. It's vital to read the tank mixing section because some products shouldn't be used together. Ignoring tank mixing guidelines can cause problems like clogged application equipment and reduced efficacy.

Perhaps just as important is mixing order, which is also detailed on product labels.

The basic rule of thumb is that dry materials need to be mixed first, followed by liquids. But rather than assuming this is always the case, it's recommended that users follow the label closely when mixing products.

Special Statements

Products often have special statements on the label to help users utilize the product correctly. For instance, many products include statements about what the outside temperature should be when a product is used. If the label says not to apply the product if it's warmer than 85 degrees outside, and you do, it could cause damage to the plant.

Other common special statements refer to drying time. Applying a product prior to a rainfall when the product label states that six hours of drying time is necessary is a pretty expensive mistake.

Group Numbers

The front page of many product labels includes a group number, which helps users avoid resistance issues with fungicides, herbicides and insecticides. Products are grouped based on how they work (mode of action) and users are encouraged to vary group numbers of products in an effort to better manage resistance.

For example, if after using a fungicide in Group 1 you have concerns about resistance, use a product with a different group number in the next application.

Agricultural Use Requirements

The agricultural and non-agricultural use requirements on product labels are important for users and vary depending on product use.

A greenhouse or nursery employee, for instance, may use the same product as a golf course superintendent or lawn care employee, but has to abide by a completely different set of rules with regard to protective equipment and re-entry interval.

General Restrictions and Limitations

An often overlooked element of product labels is the "general restrictions and limitations" section, which is also known as "do not" statements. A "do not" statement is a strong declaration that needs to be followed.

For example, a product might have "Do not apply in greenhouses" on the label because the product is volatile and could move through the air to plants, causing foliar damage.

Read the "do not" statements carefully and be sure to brush up on them if it's been a while since you last used a product.

General Suggestions

Though it's unnecessary to continually read and re-read the label for a product that you use several times a year, it's a good idea to take some time now and again to re-familiarize yourself with product labels.

Labels change periodically, so it makes sense to review commonly used product labels about once a year. The best place to obtain current labels is www.cdms.net.

The 10-15 minute investment of reading a label can save a lot of time and hassle compared to the fallout of misusing a product.

(Editor's Note: David Oberle is a senior sales specialist with BASF Corp. in the Midwest region and currently serves on the Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents' Association Board of Directors.)