

Emergency Response Plan For Pesticide Spills

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Pesticide and fertilizer spills are part of the risk associated with the use of these products. Accidents can happen to the most experienced and careful applicators, yet those applicators that are prepared for accidental spills will come away with minimal environmental damage or liability to the company. All turf management operations that use pesticides or fertilizers need to be equipped with an emergency response plan.

Let's first examine the legal responsibility of spills. My interpretation of our Michigan statutes define illegal "releases" as any substance that can cause harm or depreciate the land, water, air, or wildlife, and those releases must be cleaned up by the person responsible. While my interpretation of the language is rather broad, the intent of the law is to protect our environmental resources and human health. Therefore, it is our responsibility to clean up after all spills of pesticide or fertilizer products. The enforcement of spill clean-up for any type of material is primarily located within the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Quality. Recently, there has been an arrangement between the DEQ and the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) to allow the MDA to become involved in spills. This arrangement has been very successful and allowed for logical and consistent direction for handling spills of agricultural chemicals.

The general mode of action when handling spills is often referred to as the four "C's" -

- Control the source
- Contain the spill
- Comply with reporting requirements
- Clean up

Your first response to a spill is to protect yourself and slap on appropriate personal protective gear if you are not adequately protected. Then work quickly to assess and control the source. Next contain the spill to prevent it from reaching water sources or any type of drain system. Contact help immediately if needed. By law, all spills should be reported so that clear instructions and quick assessment of potential damage can be conducted by the professionals. Your first call is to the MDA hotline -

1-800-405-0101

This line will be connected to the Stewardship Division at the MDA and they can instruct you on how to best handle the final clean-up and handling of the spill. The intent of this system is to assist you in gathering the affected material (soil, turf, water), identifying the extent of damage, determining the amount of product involved, and getting the material out on a labeled site as the disposal mechanism. This system has been effective in providing common sense solutions to spill problems that have the potential to cost you time and huge expense in clean-up.