Reprint from A PATCH OF GREEN
DECONTAMINATION OF SPRAY EQUIPMENT

Thorough cleaning of equipment not only reduces the possibility of crop injury from herbicides left in the tank but extends the life of the equipment. Since herbicides vary in their chemistry and the way they are formulated, there is no standard procedure for decontamination. The most important step is to use a rinse material which acts as a solvent for the herbicide.

Repeated rinsing with water is usually sufficient for removing the wettable powder suspensions of compounds such as phenyl ureas and triazines. The sprayer should be scrubbed and rinsed with water several times and the residue emptied on an area where there is no danger of contaminating water or injuring crops. Operation of the pump for at least 3 minutes will remove contaminates from the boom, hoses, and nozzles. Addition of detergents will aid in the cleaning operation but should be followed by a clean water rinse to remove any detergent which might reduce the selectivity of the next herbicide to be used.

Salts of 2, 4-D, banvel, and picioram are relatively water-soluable, however, the spray equipment should be rinsed with water and filled with a strong solution of synthetic detergent or 2 lbs. of washing soda per 100 gallons of water. The mixture should be left in the sprayer for at least 24 hours and rinsed with a second detergent or soda mixture before final rinsing with water. Always spray some of the mixture through the system before mixture through the system at both the beginning and end of the soaking period. An effective and rapid but more expensive method is to rinse the system for at least 5 minutes with a 1% solution of activated charcoal. This should be followed with a thorough rinse of clean water. The use of activated charcoal eliminates the need for a long soaking period.

Oil-soluble herbicides such as 2, 4-D esters are usually the most difficult to remove. The preferred choice is to have a separate sprayer for these materials only. If this cannot be done, the system should be filled with water and household ammonia (1 qt./25 gal. of water) and left to soak for 24 hours. Do not use ammonia if any part of the system is made of brass.

Kerosene and fuel oil can be used as an alternate means of removing oil-soluble herbicides, however, enough of the oil has to be put into the tank to enable the pump to circulate it adequately throughout the system (do not use oil on parts made of natural rubber). After the tank has been scrubbed with oil and rinsed, a wetting agent in the water will help remove the oil. Regardless of which method is used, it is important to circulate the cleaning material throughout the system and thoroughly flush with clean water.

Chemicals other than ammonia, charcoal, oil or wetting agents are not recommended for cleaning spray equipment. Some chemicals may remove the odor of herbicides without affecting the active ingredients and be misleading. The absence of odor cannot be taken as an indication of decontamination.

Greg Patchan

Running a business without advertising is like winking at a pretty girl in the dark — you know what you're doing but she doesn't.