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Brief labels for pesticides not practical

Like many other users of pesticides, you may wonder why the instructions for using a herbicide or insecticide are so long and complicated. If you want a product label that will tell the whole story in 25 words or less, a University of Idaho expert can give you 100 good reasons why this hoped-for brevity would not be to your advantage.

"Pesticides can be used effectively only when the applicator understands the characteristics of the product he is using — and that's the information you get on the product label," Glen A. Murray, professor of plant and soil sciences, said at the UI Plant Protection Seminar.

Users of agricultural chemicals cannot expect good results if they ignore the warnings included on the product labels, the UI professor said. Instructions for coping with wind, water and other environmental factors merit close attention, he said.

"Under hot, dry, windy conditions, spraying a pesticide on plants may do little good," Murray said. "The pesticide may evaporate before the plant can absorb it. Wetting agents such as oils and detergents reduce evaporation and decrease loss of the pesticide."

Soil-applied pesticides may encounter many barriers that prevent contact with plant roots and underground shoots, he added.

"The pesticides may be lost through leaching or soil erosion. Light, chemicals or soil microorganisms may break down the pesticides, making them ineffective," he said.

As a guide to effective use of pesticides, Murray offered this short, clearly worded slogan: "Read the label and follow the instructions to the letter." □