

Labels don't warn, they scare

Let's face it, EPA and law-abiding pesticide manufacturers in their zeal to make label directions and warnings precisely accurate, have created a monster, a scary monster.

The reason for a label on a pesticide container is to assure that the applicator knows how to effectively control a specific pest while protecting himself, people in the area, and the environment. It is an important tool in keeping a pesticide's risks in balance with its benefits.

It is doubtful today whether most labels accomplish this purpose, are read at all by most applicators, and, if read, are intelligible to the majority.

Furthermore, some municipal lawmakers are requiring applicators to provide customers and neighbors of customers with labels as a preapplication warning.

The label was never intended to be a preapplication notification for a customer or his neighbors. Imagine how a housewife feels when a stranger (an applicator) knocks on her door, hands her a little booklet filled with five syllable scientific words, and informs her he will be spraying the neighbor's property within 24 hours. The result is a predictable overreaction by the customer.

A completely different document should be designed for prenotification, one that clearly, and simply, explains the benefits and risks of pesticides. The benefits of the chemical should receive the same importance on the handout as the skull and crossbones. The appearance of the handout should be pleasant, not harsh and depressing.

It is completely feasible and fair to provide the necessary information about reentry, drift protection, and antidotes in a pleasant form rather than a Halloween or *Thriller* form.

We can't realistically expect EPA to come up with a creative and pleasant design. It will take an artist, not a scientist, to pull it off.



by Bruce F. Shank, executive editor

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