

# What to tell customers when they ask, 'Are your pesticides safe?'

■ When customers, who observe our use of pesticides on their property, voice their concern about environmental damage with questions like these, be prepared with reassuring answers:

**Customer:** Are your pesticides safe? Have they been tested against hazards to humans?

**You:** Yes and yes. All pesticides used in and around the home must comply with the testing requirements of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the EPA constantly checks new products. You should also know that most lawn care pesticides are used extensively on food crops.

**Customer:** Do the pesticides you use contain cancer-causing chemicals?

**You:** The EPA has no data proving that any currently-used lawn care pesticide is a human carcinogen. All such chemicals are evaluated in life-time feeding studies of rats and mice. They are fed the maximum toler-

ated dose which often equates to millions of times greater exposure than any human would experience in a lifetime.

**Customer:** My children and pets play on the lawn you are treating. Is this safe?

**You:** Absolutely, because

1) There is no scientific evidence that adverse effects occur with occasional exposure to residues of dilute applications of any pesticide I use. This is less than one percent.

2) Most lawns require only three applications of pesticides yearly, at the very maximum.

3) But to be absolutely safe, be sure that all treated areas are dry before you allow children, or anyone else, to use them.

**Customer:** In addition to controlling insects, are there any advantages to using pesticides on my lawn?

**You:** Definitely. Turf care chemicals improve the beauty of the landscape, control soil erosion, keep mud and dirt out of buildings, absorb noise and air pollutants, and cool the neighborhood. They also provide a safer playing surface for children.

**Customer:** Do you rely solely on chemicals to protect lawns?

**You:** No. The primary component of lawn care is proper fertilization. This helps the turf resist weeds, insects and diseases. Any chemicals I use are selected for special problems, and I usually prefer spot treatments.

## Training pesticide workers

**A quality pesticide safety program will probably represent a significant expense for your company.**

■ A veritable plethora of laws and regulations control the purchase, transportation, storage, application and disposal of pesticides.

Sometimes it seems as though new requirements are imposed almost daily. In addition, sweeping changes in EPA worker safety standards and in applicator certification laws are on the horizon.

As an employer, you have several good reasons to teach your employees how to handle pesticides properly:

1) It helps develop work habits that will result in a safer work environment. Reducing work-related illness, injuries and



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accidents will probably increase productivity and possibly lower insurance rates.

2) It helps prevent the waste of costly pesticides and can even reduce the amount of time required to apply them. Properly applied pesticides are less apt to cause unwanted damage. Correct rates and application techniques also improve pesticide effectiveness.

3) It helps avoid pesticide injury and damage lawsuits resulting from accidents, misapplications or carelessness—lawsuits that often result in huge monetary settlements.

4) It helps protect the environment. When pesticides drift off target or are acci-

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dentally spilled or intentionally dumped, serious damage—such as groundwater contamination—can occur.

5) It puts you in compliance with government regulations. The EPA, for instance, requires commercial users of restricted-use pesticides to be certified applicators or to work under the supervision of a certified applicator.

Recent worker right-to-know laws mandate that all employers inform their workers about potential health hazards and how to avoid exposure to hazardous substances—including pesticides—in the workplace.

**The scope of training**—Most people require training before safely handling pesticides. The applicator must understand:

- how to operate application equipment,
- how to properly mix the chemicals and dispose of the excess,
- how to apply the chemicals,
- how to avoid hazards, and
- how to respond to accidents.

Two types of training are available: in-house training and outside training, which can include continuing education provided by professional organizations and cooperative extension services.

*In-house training* is conducted by you or someone in your company. The objective is to ensure compliance with legal mandates or with company policy.

Employees who apply, or supervise the application of, restricted-use pesticides probably passed their state certification examinations by participating in *outside training* sessions or through self-study programs.

Your state cooperative extension service may produce some training aids. University libraries, state and federal regulatory agencies, pesticide manufacturers, trade organizations and worker's compensation insur-

ance companies are other sources for current pesticide safety information. In most cases, you will need to adapt this information to fit your specific situation.

A quality pesticide safety training program will probably represent a significant expense for your company.

You must compensate the instructor, and you must release your employees from the regular duties but still pay them for the time spent in training. You must allow certified applicators to attend off-site continuing education courses, with pay, to retain their certification. And, unfortunately, there is little chance that your company will be able to totally recover these costs through lower insurance premiums or increased productivity.

However, adequately trained employees may be able to eliminate or significantly reduce injuries, damage and liability by preventing accidents or by responding appropriately when an accident occurs. Therefore, training provides a form of insurance against injury, damage or liability.

**Key tips**—Your program's success depends on a variety of factors.

- The instructor must be comfortable with the subject and must enthusiastically convey the importance of the information to your employees. The teaching staff will need adequate resources to develop and present an effective training program.

- Training will be easier if you divide the subject matter into small segments that can be covered in a short period. Thirty minutes is reasonable.

- Hold the training session where there will be no interruptions or distractions. You must convey to your employees that pesticide safety training is important.

- Whenever possible, use hands-on training. Allow your employees to see, hear and touch.

For example, hand an employee a pesticide container and ask him to point out the signal word or other significant label information. Ask employees to put on protective clothing to demonstrate their use. Let them practice cleaning up a simulated pesticide spill.

- Employees will learn more and enjoy the training if they interact with the instructor and with each other. Encourage them to ask questions, provide information or discuss reasons for doing something a certain way.

- Prepare an agenda and stick to it. Keep the discussion on track within the scope of the immediate session. If other points come up, schedule time during another session to discuss them.

- Add variety to your training sessions. Sometimes a video (see last month's issue), followed by a discussion, provides a lot of useful information or serves as an overview. (Don't substitute videos for other types of training.)

- Hold some sessions in actual work areas near the pesticide application equipment. Conduct the class in the pesticide storage area when teaching how to store pesticides or how to clean up a spill. When discussing pesticide application, take employees outside among the plants and let them see how pressure changes affect coverage, drift and spray patterns. Use plain or colored water during your demonstrations, but make sure employees using the equipment are wearing the appropriate protective clothing.

—This material is excerpted from an article that appeared in the December, 1991 issue of the Georgia Green Industry Association's newsletter.

## LANGUAGE

## BARRIERS

■ One of the greatest barriers to a successful and effective pesticide safety training program is coping with employees who do not understand. This problem can stem from varying educational levels, language barriers, poor reading abilities or differing attention spans.

Language is the predominant factor. Some workers are not fluent enough in English to understand verbal instructions or written materials. Conversely, the instructor may not be fluent enough in the employees' native language to effectively discuss pesticide safety.

You may have to be innovative to ensure that your employees understand the material being taught. Non-written methods and materials, such as simple drawings or cartoons depict

ing people performing tasks correctly or incorrectly, may be very useful. You can show these drawings to open up a discussion about what is happening and what the outcome would be.

For example, you could use a drawing to teach employees not to put pesticides into food containers. Ask them to describe what the person in the drawing is doing and why he would be doing this. Then ask them to list the possible dangers of this practice and why it should be avoided.

Such a discussion could reveal why people become injured or poisoned by pesticides, what types of symptoms to look for, what kinds of first aid treatments to use and how to avoid pesticide exposure.