



No. 47: How to Handle Spills of Household Pesticide

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BACKGROUND

Pesticides, including insecticides, herbicides, rodenticides, fungicides, etc., are toxic, by definition. Therefore, any spill or accident involving any type of pesticide must be managed carefully and safely. This leaflet provides guidelines for managing a pesticide spill should one occur.

BE PREPARED

Read the label before buying or using pesticide products. Be aware of specific directions for use, safety, and spill cleanup.

Make sure you have the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and clothing listed on the label ready to use.

Be sure to wear the PPE when cleaning up spills, as well as during mixing and application. Do not wear any leather items because leather absorbs pesticides and cannot be effectively decontaminated.

Have emergency phone numbers and the product name easily accessible and readable. Emergency numbers such as Poison Control (**1-800-222-1222**) can be found on pesticide labels, online, in the inside cover of phone books, or in [Pesticide Information Leaflet No. 4: Pesticide Emergency and Non-Emergency Information and Resources](#).

Have absorbent material available in the event of a spill. Cat litter is a good absorbent material, but sawdust, sweeping compound, newspapers, or paper towels may also be used.

Keep children and pets away from pesticides. Store pesticides where children, pets, and other animals cannot reach them. Having children or pets around during mixing or application exposes them unnecessarily and increases the likelihood of an accident or spill.

CONTROL THE SPILL

If a spill occurs, stop it from continuing or getting worse. Stand up tipped over containers. Put leaking containers into a larger container to temporarily contain spill. Turn off or stop using leaking or broken equipment.

CONTAIN THE SPILL

Prevent the spill from spreading. Spread cat litter or other absorbent material on liquid spills. Cover dry spills if you need to leave to get help.

Do not wash down spills with water. This will only cause the pesticide to spread.

If necessary, dike liquid spills, especially if they are heading towards drains or other water sources. You can use the spill control materials listed above (cat litter, paper towels, etc.) to build a dike or barrier.

CLEAN UP THE SPILL

Be sure to wear waterproof or chemical-protective gloves (as well as any other protective clothing the label recommends

for handling) while you are cleaning up the spill. When you have finished cleaning up the spill, wash any lightly contaminated clothing in hot water with heavy duty detergent separate from other family laundry. Regular household detergents formulated to remove oils or grease are good choices because pesticide products are often formulated in oil-based solvents. Dispose of clothing exposed to large amounts or to concentrated formulations.

Sweep or scoop used/contaminated absorbent material into a heavy duty plastic bag. Small amounts of household pesticides may be sealed in a plastic bag and disposed of with household trash.

If the spill occurs on a hard surface, scrub the area with bleach or a heavy-duty detergent. Use as little liquid as possible and do not rinse or wash it down. Instead, soak it up with more absorbent material and dispose of this with the rest of the contaminated absorbent material.

Brooms and other material used to clean up the spill but that cannot be cleaned themselves should also be sealed in a heavy duty plastic bag and disposed of.

SOURCES

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