



No. 11: Practices for Safe Use

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BACKGROUND

A pesticide is any chemical used to control a pest. The pest may be an insect, weed, rodent, plant disease agent, or other type of pest. Therefore, insecticides, herbicides (weed killers), rodenticides, fungicides, bactericides, etc. are all considered pesticides. Pesticides are designed to be toxic to the pests they control, but may affect other organisms as well. Some pesticides are extremely toxic, while others are only very slightly toxic to humans, beneficial insects, and desirable plants and animals. To avoid harmful effects, all pesticides must be used carefully.

Each pesticide label contains a great deal of information on how to use that specific product. The importance of reading and following all label directions cannot be overemphasized.

This leaflet provides a list of safe practices to be used in conjunction with the label directions anytime you plan to use a pesticide.

BEFORE USING A PESTICIDE

The label contains information you'll need to help you choose the product that's right for your situation. Read the label:

- to be sure the pest you want to control is listed on the label;
- to be sure the site or plant to which you intend to apply the pesticide is listed on the label;
- to see if any special protective clothing or equipment is necessary;
- to find out what equipment to use to apply the pesticide;
- to see whether the pesticide is toxic to certain desirable plants; it may be necessary to remove or cover them;
- to be sure you are applying the pesticide at the correct time.

Buy only enough pesticide for one or, at most, two years. Pesticides stored longer may degrade and become less effective. They can also pose special hazards when stored.

To avoid contaminating pet environments, remove or cover pet food and water dishes, fish tanks, etc.

DURING APPLICATION

Keep pesticides from coming in contact with your eyes, mouth, or skin. Pesticides may be absorbed through all of these routes. Depending on the chemical and how much is absorbed, irritation, disease, or injury could result.

When applying any pesticide, be sure to observe the label requirements for any special clothing or gear such as goggles, impermeable gloves, boots, etc. At a minimum, you should always wear long trousers, a long-sleeved shirt, socks, and shoes.

Do not wear leather shoes, boots, or gloves while handling pesticides. Leather absorbs pesticides and cannot be decontaminated easily. This means that each additional time you wear the leather, you would be exposing yourself to additional pesticide residues.

Avoid breathing spray mists. Stand upwind while mixing and applying pesticides. This limits the chance of accidental inhalation as well as exposure through contact with contaminated clothes or PPE. Open the windows when spraying indoors. Be aware that dust masks do not protect against pesticide vapors.

Keep children and pets out of the treated area until the spray has dried or the dust has settled. Follow the label directions if a longer reentry period is listed.

While working with pesticides, wash your hands with soap and water before eating, smoking or chewing tobacco products or gum, or using the toilet. Pesticide residues may be present on your hands, even when wearing gloves, and must be washed off to prevent from being transferred into your mouth or to sensitive areas of your body where the residues could be absorbed easily through your skin.

Never apply a pesticide where it could contact food, utensils, or food preparation areas, unless the label *specifically* allows for such contact.

If you are applying the pesticide to fruits, vegetables, or other edible plants, check the label to see if you must wait before harvesting.

Carefully follow label directions for the method of application. When practical, use spot treatments rather than broadcast sprays. If the label specifies "crack and crevice" treatment, apply only as a very narrow band.

Never apply a pesticide at a higher rate than the label directs. Using more pesticide than directed does not offer greater effectiveness and could result in harmful residues.

Never apply a pesticide where it could contact water sources and avoid applying to bare ground unless the label *specifically* allows for such use.

AFTER USING A PESTICIDE

Wash your hands with soap and water immediately after applying a pesticide. Shower as soon as possible to remove any residues on your skin.

Wash all clothing worn during mixing and application separately from household laundry. To ensure maximum breakdown of any pesticide residues, use a heavy duty detergent and hot water, and dry the clothes in a hot dryer or outside in the sun.

To avoid transferring residues, keep pesticide measuring utensils separate from household and kitchen utensils.

Store pesticides only in their original containers, with intact labels. Containers not intended for pesticides may degrade or be confused for other products or food. Keep pesticides in a locked building or cabinet away from food, feed, seed, and fertilizers.

Dispose of empty pesticide containers in accordance with label directions and state and local requirements. *Pesticide Information Leaflet Nos. [13](#) and [38](#) provide guidelines on proper disposal.*