



COLORADO ENVIRONMENTAL PESTICIDE EDUCATION PROGRAM

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FEDERAL WORKER PROTECTION STANDARD

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This fact sheet defines the Worker Protection Standard (WPS) and provides a summary of WPS requirements and exemptions.

This fact sheet was revised as part of the Comprehensive Worker Protection Standard Awareness Project for Colorado.

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Federal Worker Protection Standard

The [Worker Protection Standard](#) (WPS) was issued in 1992 by the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA). This regulation applies where pesticides are used in production of agricultural plants for commercial or research purposes on farms, forests, nurseries, greenhouses, and related structures. It covers pesticide applicators, mixer/loaders, disposers of pesticide containers, and those who may be exposed to a pesticide residue on the job.

The regulations have exposure reduction measures that will reduce the risk of pesticide poisonings and injuries among agricultural workers and pesticide handlers. WPS defines two groups of agricultural employees: **agricultural workers** and **pesticide handlers**. Agricultural workers may not handle pesticides or enter treated areas during the re-entry interval, except under narrow exceptions. Pesticide handlers are trained to handle and apply pesticides.

Pesticide Handlers - Under the WPS, you may be both a handler and an employer of handlers. A pesticide handler is:

1. Anyone who is employed (including self-employed) for any type of compensation by an agricultural establishment or a commercial pesticide handling establishment that uses pesticides in the production of agricultural plants on a farm, forest, nursery, or greenhouse.
2. Anyone who is performing any of the following tasks:
 - Mixing, loading, transferring, or applying pesticides; handling opened containers of pesticides; acting as a flagger; cleaning, handling, adjusting, or repairing the parts of application equipment that may contain pesticide residues; and/or assisting with the application of pesticides, including incorporating the pesticide into the soil after the application has occurred
 - Entering a greenhouse or other enclosed area after application and before the inhalation exposure level listed on the product labeling has been reached or one of the WPS ventilation criteria has been met to operate ventilation equipment; and/or adjust or remove coverings (such as tarps) used in fumigation, or check air concentration levels
 - Entering a treated area outdoors after application of any soil fumigant to adjust or remove soil coverings, such as tarpaulins; performing tasks as a crop advisor during any pesticide application, before any inhalation exposure level or ventilation criteria listed in the labeling has been reached or one of the WPS ventilation criteria has been met during any restricted-entry interval; and/or disposing of pesticides or pesticide containers

A person is not a pesticide handler if he/she only handles pesticide containers that have been emptied or cleaned according to instructions on the pesticide product labeling. If the labeling has no such instructions, the pesticide containers have been triple-rinsed or cleaned by an equivalent method, such as pressure rinsing. In addition, a person is not a handler if he/she is only handling pesticide containers that are unopened and is not, at the same time, also doing any handling task (such as mixing or loading).

Workers - Under the WPS, you may be both a worker and an employer of workers. A worker is anyone who:

1. Is employed (including self-employed) for any type of production of agricultural plants on a farm, forest, nursery, or greenhouse for any type of compensation
2. Is performing tasks such as harvesting, weeding, watering, or other hand labor. This term does not include persons who are employed by a commercial establishment to perform tasks as crop advisors

Summary of WPS Requirements

Protection during applications - Handlers are prohibited from applying a pesticide in a way that will expose workers or other persons. Workers are excluded from areas during treatment with pesticides.

Restricted-entry intervals (REIs) - REI is the time immediately after a pesticide application when entry into the treated area is limited. REIs are established for all pesticides used in the production of agricultural plants depending on toxicity. The REI is listed on the pesticide labeling under the heading "Agricultural Use Requirements" in the "Directions for Use" section of the pesticide labeling or next to the crop or application method to which it applies.

REIs must be specified on all agricultural plant pesticide product labels. Workers are excluded from entering a pesticide treated area during the REI, with few narrow exceptions. The duration of REIs ranges from 4 hours to several days. Some pesticides have one REI, such as 12 hours, for all crops and uses. Other products have different REIs, depending on the crop or method of application.

There is a no-entry period for 4 hours for all products with WPS labeling; this means no early entry. When two or more pesticides are applied at the same time and have different REIs, the longer interval must be followed.

Some pesticide uses are not covered by the WPS, even when the "Agricultural Use Requirements" section is on the labeling. WPS does NOT cover research on uses of unregistered pesticides or pesticides applied to pastures or animals.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) - PPE must be provided and maintained for handlers and early entry workers by the employer. The PPE and other work attire required for each pesticide are listed on the pesticide label for the tasks being performed. The required PPE for a specific compound is listed under the "Hazards to Humans" section on the label.

Notification of workers - The employer must notify workers of any pesticide application in accordance with WPS. The warnings serve to inform workers of areas treated with pesticides and

the length of the REI.

- **Oral Notification and Posting.** Some pesticide labels require that workers be notified both orally and with signs posted at entrances to the treated area. If both types of notification are required, the following statement will appear under the heading, "Agricultural Use Requirements": "Notify workers of the application by warning them orally and by posting warning signs at entrances to treated areas." Otherwise, either oral notification or sign posting may be used to notify workers about treated areas. Workers should be told which method is in effect.
- **Oral notification.** Notification must take place before application or before employees begin work, including location and description of treated area, length of REI, and instructions not to enter.
- **Sign posting.** Post legible 14"x16" WPS-design signs no more than 24 hours before application; keep posted during REI; remove within 3 days after the end of the REI. Worker entry (except early entry) is prohibited while signs are posted. Post signs so they can be seen at all entrances to treated areas, including access roads, each border adjacent to fields where workers may be working, and established walking routes that enter the treated fields. If there are no usual points of entry, post at corners or places where signs will be easily seen. Post all greenhouse applications.
- **Communication with other applicators.** Researchers and other personnel should exchange details concerning pesticide application on the facility with farm or greenhouse managers/supervisors.

Decontamination supplies - Handlers and workers must have an ample supply of potable water, soap, and single service towels for routine washing and emergency decontamination. Decontamination supplies must be provided to handlers during the task and must be provided to workers for a full 30 days past the expiration of the REI if they will be in or within 1/4 mile of that field.

Emergency assistance - Transportation to a medical care facility must be made available if a worker or handler may have been poisoned or injured. The employer must provide to the victim and medical personnel the following information:

- The product name, EPA registration number, and active ingredients
- All first aid and medical information from the label
- A description of how the pesticide was used
- Information about the victim's exposure

Central posting - Site specific information (i.e., application lists with dates, locations, and the closest medical help with telephone number provided) or recent pesticide applications in the work area must be posted in a central location. This area must and information must be easily read and accessible by employees.

Pesticide safety posters - A pesticide safety poster, available from EPA's Ag Compliance Assistance Center, must be displayed at the Central Location.

Pesticide safety training - Both handlers and workers must be provided with certain pesticide safety training. Basic training must be given before the employee begins work. Training must be completed within 5 days. Employees who will handle pesticides or enter fields before the expiration

of the REI must be completely trained before they begin work. Retraining is required after 5 years. Employees who have received a pesticide license to purchase/apply restricted use pesticides (RUPs) do not need additional training (see Pesticide Fact Sheet [#125](#)).

WPS training can use written and/or audiovisual materials, and the training can be presented orally or audiovisually. The training should be conducted in a language and a manner that will be understood by the trainee. Training videos and materials are available from [CEPEP](#).

To serve as a trainer in Colorado, you must meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Be a certified RUP applicator. Certified applicators do not need further WPS training. They may serve as trainers of both handlers and workers.
- Attend a WPS Train-the-Trainer workshop approved by the [EPA Region 8](#). Individuals who have attended such a workshop may train both handlers and workers.
- Be trained as a handler. Persons trained as handlers under the WPS may serve as trainers of workers only; they may not train handlers.

Access to labeling - Handlers and workers must be informed of pesticide label requirements and information.

WPS Exemptions

Crop Advisors are exempt from WPS except for pesticide safety training (handler training). If crop advisors enter a treated area during application or the REI, they must wear handler PPE.

Irrigation Activities - This exemption allows workers to perform irrigation tasks during an REI (except for double notification pesticides) after the first 4 hours. They must wear PPE for early entry workers and insure that contact with treated surfaces is minimal and limited to the feet, lower legs, hands, and forearms. No hand labor. Time in the treated area must not exceed 8 hours in a 24-hour period. The employer must notify workers of the exception to the WPS.

Limited Contact Activities - Allows workers to perform limited contact activities during an REI (except for double notification pesticides) after the first 4 hours. They must wear PPE for early entry workers and insure that contact with treated surfaces is minimal and limited to the feet, lower legs, hands, and forearms. No hand labor. Time in the treated area must not exceed 8 hours in a 24-hour period. The employer must notify workers of the exception to the WPS.

Disclaimer: The Worker Protection Standard is a very complex regulation that will require considerable study. This fact sheet is just an introduction and should not be used as a final interpretation. Refer to the complete WPS regulations in the [Code of Federal Register 40 Part 170](#).

References and Resources

The Worker Protection Standard for Agricultural Pesticides - How to Comply, What Employers Need to Know. July 1993. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, EPA 735-B-93-001, Washington, D.C.

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