

Working with Pesticides

Pesticides are chemical and biological substances that are used to kill or control pests, such as rodents, insects, fungi and plants.

Pesticides include fungicides, herbicides, weedicides and insecticides.

They can cause harm to humans, animals or the environment.

Some pesticide products are available for household use, while a larger number are available for business.

Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) is responsible for pesticide regulation in Canada. The use and sale of pesticides as well as the granting of permits, licenses and certifications are regulated in Manitoba under the Pesticides and Fertilizers Control Act.

More than 95 percent of all pesticide exposures come from exposure through the skin, primarily to the hands and forearms.

What are the Health risks?

Pesticides are absorbed through the skin, or by breathing or swallowing them.

Short-term effects of pesticides — can result in rashes, shortness of breath, vomiting and death.

Long-term effects — can be disorders to the immune system, liver and kidney damage, respiratory ailments (asthma, bronchitis) and cancer.

What is the danger to the environment?

- Pesticides enter surfaces and ground water primarily as runoff from crops, accidental spills/leaks, and improper disposal resulting in soil and water contamination.

- Pesticide drift — pesticides move through the air, causing contamination of the soil, water courses and exposure to humans.
- Pesticides can also cause cancer and deformities in animals.

The dangers of unsafe pesticide use are real!

- Workers exposed to pesticides under unsafe conditions may suffer short term and long term health problems.
- Pesticide poisoning can cause serious illness and even death.
- Pesticides can destroy a worker's ability to have children.
- Workers exposed to unsafe levels of pesticides can endanger their families when they come home from work. Children are at greater risk from pesticide exposure; low levels of pesticide can create serious health problems.
- Pesticides can hurt you months or years later after it get into your skin, eyes, mouth or lungs.

What can employers do?

It is the employer's duty to provide you with a safe work environment. Employers should

- Involve workers in identifying and addressing risks to their health.
- Establish policies and procedures to prevent exposures to pesticides.
- Warn the workers about pesticide treated areas. These areas should have the appropriate warning signs.
- Make sure emergency procedures are in place to deal with pesticide poisonings.
- Ensure workers who apply, handle, transport or dispose pesticides are given appropriate information and training to deal with pesticides safely.

How will I know if I am poisoned while using pesticides?

The symptoms of pesticide poisoning can range from mild skin irritation to coma or even death.

Be alert for the early signs and symptoms of pesticide poisoning in yourself and others. These often occur immediately after exposure, but they could be delayed for up to 24 hours. If you are having symptoms but are unsure if they are pesticide related, at least notify someone in case your symptoms become worse.

Get medical help. Take any information you have about the pesticide (e.g., bring the label or can) to the doctor or hospital.

You can prevent pesticides from entering your body by

- Follow the label instructions and use personal protective clothing and equipment (PPE).
- Wash your hands with soap and water before you eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum or tobacco.
- Shower after work (including washing your hair).
- Change into clean clothes before going home.
- Wash your work clothes separately from other clothing.
- Wash immediately if pesticides are sprayed or spilled on you.

General guidelines for outdoor use of pesticides

- Never spray a pesticide if wind speed is more than 8 kph (5 mph), or air temperature is above 30 C (86 F), or if it is raining.
- Never burn or pour pesticides down the drain.
- If noted on the pesticide label, post appropriate warning signs to notify neighbours and to keep children and pets away from the treated area.



Key factors to remember when using pesticides

- Always read the label or the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) and follow the instructions every time it is used.
- Inspect pesticide containers for leaks before handling.
- Work in well ventilated area. Use proper tools to open the container and do not stir pesticides with your hands.
- Store and dispose the pesticide containers safely — as recommended.
- If pesticides drift to where you work, move away.

For more information

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102-275 Broadway
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 4M6
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Fax: (204) 956-0848
Toll Free: 1-888-843-1229(Manitoba only)
Email: mflohc@mflohc.mb.ca

Links to the following websites gives you more information on pesticides.

Canadian Centre for Occupational Safety and Health <http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/chemicals/pesticides/>

Health Canada
<http://www.sc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/pest/index-eng.php/>

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