



## Safely Handling Pesticides: Script

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Agsafe, Coalition for Health and Safety in Agriculture<sup>1</sup>

The following safety module is intended to be used as a refresher safety awareness session and is in no way to be used as a substitute for job training nor proper equipment use.

Pesticides are vital to the agricultural industry for the production of food and fiber, and are quite effective when used appropriately. However, you must be very careful about how you handle these chemicals, as well as how you transport, store, mix, load, apply and dispose of them. Your employer knows the potential risks of using agricultural chemicals. When these materials need to be used, only authorized and trained people will be allowed to handle them.

Employees are not allowed to enter areas that have been treated with an agricultural chemical until both the California re-entry requirement and the chemical manufacturer's recommendations on the label allow re-entry. If you have questions about safe re-entry requirements, ask your supervisor.

### STORE PESTICIDES PROPERLY

Not only is it important, but it is also legally required that pesticides are stored in a safe, secure and well-identified place. (See Figure 1.)

- Pesticides should be stored in a properly labelled container with the label clearly visible. *Never* store pesticides in old bottles or food containers where they could be mistaken for food or drink for people or animals.

- You must *never* store pesticides near food, feed or seed.
- Store pesticides in containers that can be tightly sealed. Check the containers regularly to make sure they have no leaks, breaks, tears or defects.
- Store pesticides in a location away from freezing temperatures or extreme heat.
- *All* pesticides are to be stored under lock and key at all times. The building, room or structure where they are stored should be clearly marked with pesticide warning signs.

### MIX AND LOAD PESTICIDES PROPERLY

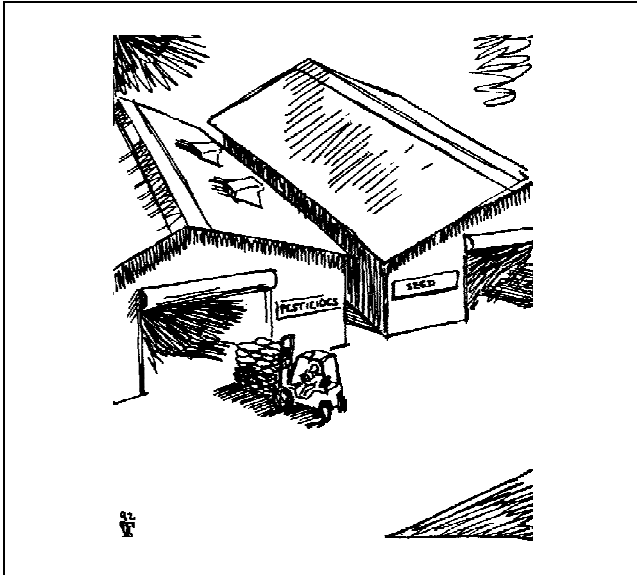
Many injuries occur when chemicals are being mixed. The most dangerous pesticide job is pouring and mixing the concentrated chemicals. (See Figure 2.)

- Before you begin to mix the chemical, **READ THE LABEL.**
- Before handling a pesticide, put on protective clothing (coveralls, gloves, boots, goggles or face shield, hat, and respirator if the label indicates one must be worn.)
- Mix the pesticides outdoors where there is good ventilation and light.
- Stand upwind of the pesticide to avoid contaminating yourself.

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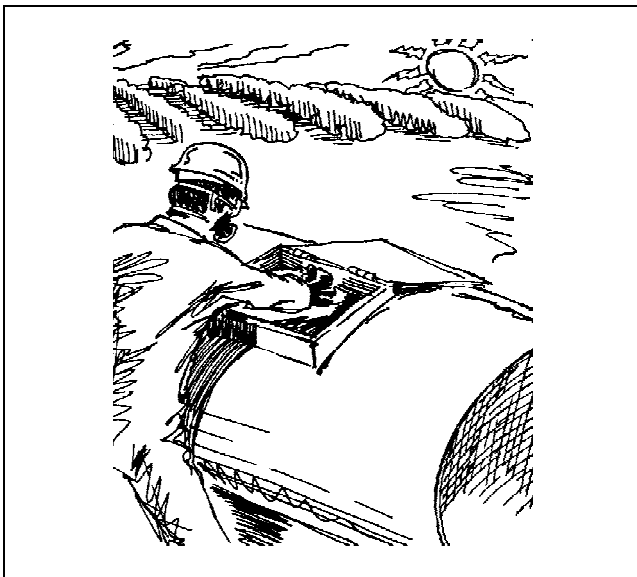
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**Figure 1.** Store pesticides in a safe, secure, well-identified place



**Figure 3.** Apply pesticides properly



**Figure 2.** Mix and load pesticides properly

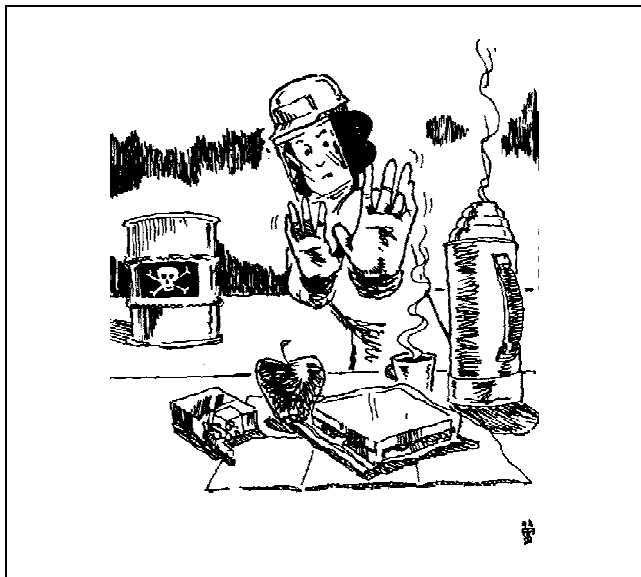
- Use a specifically designated sharp knife to open pesticide bags. Do not use scissors or a personal knife; do not tear bags open.
- Measure accurately and use only the amount specified on the label. It's against the law to use more than label directions indicate.
- When removing concentrated material from the container, keep the container below eye level to avoid splashing or spilling the pesticide into your face and eyes.

- If you splash or spill a pesticide, STOP IMMEDIATELY! Remove your contaminated clothing and wash it thoroughly with soap and water. Speed is essential when you or your clothing are contaminated. Remember also to clean up the spill.
- California safety regulations require that closed systems be used when you mix more than 1 gallon of liquid category 1 pesticides per day. Category 1 pesticides are any that have the word DANGER on the label.

### APPLY PESTICIDES PROPERLY

Careful attention to simple guidelines during pesticide mixing and application will greatly increase your ability to control the pest and will make your job much safer for you and those around you. (See Figure 3.)

- Before you begin to apply a pesticide, READ THE LABEL and put on the required protective clothing.
- Check the equipment for leaking hoses or connections and plugged or worn nozzles, and examine the filter to see that it's clean and free of debris.
- Clear all livestock, pets and people from the area to be treated and calibrate your equipment before you begin to use it to ensure the proper amount is coming out.



**Figure 4.** Don't eat, drink or smoke around pesticides



**Figure 5.** Means of pesticide entry into the body

- Mix the pesticide at the recommended rate and apply it at the specified dosage. Make sure the measurement device you use is a proper, commercially designed device for applying pesticides. Do not guess at the measurement. Apply pesticides only at the correct time and under favorable weather conditions. Never apply a pesticide if the wind will cause the pesticide to drift out of the area to be treated.
- Use extreme care to prevent the pesticide from contaminating streams, ponds, lakes or other bodies of water.

As with any safe handling training, it is important to know what you can do to prevent becoming exposed to a toxic substance. Outlined below are pointers about pesticide exposure.

### **DON'T EAT, DRINK OR SMOKE AROUND PESTICIDES**

Do not carry cigarettes in your pockets, nor eat or drink while working with pesticides. (See Figure 4.) Your cigarettes can absorb pesticide film or residue that could make you sick. Also, be careful not to wipe your face with your shirt sleeves. This could put the pesticide directly onto your bare skin.

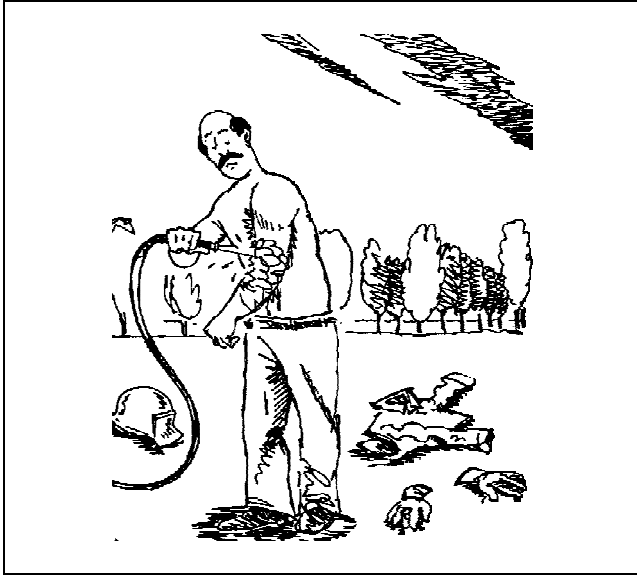
### **AVOID PESTICIDE EXPOSURE**

There are four ways that pesticides can enter the body: through the skin, the mouth, the nose and the eyes. (See Figure 5.) Pesticides can enter your body in solid, liquid or gaseous form. It's particularly important to remember that highly concentrated and highly toxic chemicals, especially liquids and gases, present the greatest danger. If they are not washed off immediately, the liquid concentrates can penetrate your unbroken skin. (See Figure 6.) The longer a pesticide remains on your skin or in your eyes, or the longer you inhale it, the greater the damage that is likely to occur. Protective clothing, such as coveralls, aprons, boots, gloves, goggles and face shields, and respirators provide protection against exposure to these chemicals.

Absorption through the skin is the most common form of poisoning. Absorption may occur from a splash, spill or drift when mixing, loading, applying, or disposing of pesticides. It may also result from exposure to large amounts of residue while cleaning out clogged nozzles and filter screens. Generally, wettable powders, dusts and granular pesticides are not as easily absorbed through the skin and other body tissues as are the liquid forms. Again, consistent use of proper protective clothing will greatly reduce the potential risk of pesticide absorption.

If a pesticide is taken into the mouth in sufficient amounts, it may cause either serious illness, severe injury, or even death. The most frequent cases of accidental oral exposure are those when pesticides have been taken out of their original labeled container and illegally put into an unlabeled bottle or food container. For this reason, always store a pesticide in a *properly labeled container*. If you get a clogged spray line or nozzle, never use your mouth to clear it. And never eat

or smoke until you have left the spray area and have washed off thoroughly with soap and water.



**Figure 6.** Rinse pesticides off skin immediately

Pesticides that are inhaled in large enough amounts can cause serious damage to nose, throat, and lung tissues. Vapors and extremely fine particles are the most serious contributors to respiratory exposure. Wear your respirator while working with powder and liquid pesticides. If you are unsure if a respirator is needed, ask your supervisor.

The tissues of the eye are particularly sensitive and absorbent, which means getting pesticides in the eyes brings an immediate threat of loss of sight, illness, or even death. In California, eye protection is required at all times. If pesticides get in your eyes, immediately flush your eyes with clean water for at least 15 minutes.