Talking to Neighbors About Pesticides

Tips and obligations for private, commercial, and public applicators when neighbors ask about pesticides.

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Boom sprayer (Image Credit: Penn State Extension).

A neighbor has questions about the pesticides sprayed on your property. What are you legally obligated to provide and how can these situations be handled? Commercial and public applicators are required to follow laws around notifying individuals in the Pesticide Hypersensitivity Registry (more details below). Although it is beneficial to keep good relationships with neighbors, private applicators are not legally obligated to share pesticide information with neighbors. Below are some tips for talking to your neighbors about pesticides.

Tips for talking to your neighbors about pesticides

Many people can experience fear around pesticide applications. Below are a few tips on talking to your neighbors about these applications.

- Every person is going to have a different perception and tolerance of risk when it comes to pesticide applications. If you are approached by a neighbor with concerns, try to take the time to listen and understand their viewpoint. When answering their questions, avoid technical jargon and rely on facts. In your responses, use everyday examples that they may be able to relate to more. For example, comparing the signal words on pesticides to the signal words on household cleaners.
- It can be helpful to explain that the word pesticide encompasses many groups of products that are specific to certain pests. For example, herbicides target weedy plants, insecticides target insects, fungicides target fungal diseases, and nematicides control nematodes. Using these terms can help show that when you make an application you are trying to target a specific pest. This is also a good time to discuss pest thresholds and only making pesticide applications when there will be a clear benefit, both to your crop and to your finances. With each application there is a cost associated with the pesticide product, fuel, and labor; therefore, a pesticide application only makes sense if the pest is present at damaging levels and the cost of the application is less than cost of the damage caused by the pest.
- Talk about Integrated Pest Management and how pesticides are only used when necessary to control a pest.
- If you own spray equipment, offer to show your neighbors the technology used to make precise applications and lower rates.

- Regardless of your certification level requirements (Private, Commercial, or Public), it is always good practice to maintain thorough records for all pesticide applications. In the event of a complaint, these records could be your best defense and demonstrate your commitment to safety. These detailed records will also help you evaluate the effectiveness of your pesticide programs for future applications. Depending on your certification level, you may not be required to disclose your application records to neighbors; however, explaining the elements of your records can help to show your neighbors that a lot of thought goes into each application.
- If your neighbor has questions you cannot answer, help direct them to resources with credible information, such as the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture or your local extension office.

Pennsylvania Pesticide Hypersensitivity Registry

The PA Department of Agriculture (PDA) maintains a registry of individuals who are hypersensitive to pesticides. The registry includes a listing of locations for people who have been verified by a physician to be excessively or abnormally sensitive to pesticides. Hypersensitive individuals may list multiple locations including their home, work, school (if a student), and vacation home.

Commercial and public pesticide applicators are required to notify hypersensitive individuals listed in the Registry 12–72 hours in advance of pesticide applications that will occur within 500 feet of any location listed in the registry.

The notification can be made by:

- Providing information to an adult at one of the phone numbers listed in the Registry
- Leaving a message on an answering machine listed as a "day or night" number
- Leaving a door hanger at the Registry listing, following at least 2 unsuccessful phone attempts
- Sending information by certified mail, fax, or e-mail
- Providing information by personal contact

The notification must include the following information:

- Date and location of the planned pesticide application
- Earliest possible start time and latest possible finish time for the application (this range cannot exceed 24 hours)
- Brand name(s) and EPA Registration Number(s) for all pesticide products which may be used
- Active ingredient common name(s) for all pesticide products which may be used
- Business contact information (Name, phone number, Business license number (BU))
- If requested by an individual from the Registry, a copy of the label for every pesticide used must be provided to them within 10 days of the request

For more information, see our Pesticide Hypersensitivity Registry and Application article (https://extension.psu.edu/pesticide-hypersensitivity-registry-and-application) or contact your regional PDA office.

Pesticide Labels and Safety Data Sheets

If you are looking for additional copies, many pesticide labels and their Safety Data Sheets (SDS) can be found in the Crop Data management Systems database(https://www.cdms.net/Label-Database). You can search for a product by brand name or other criteria. Once you select the product, under "Labels/SDS", there will be a product label, any supplemental materials, and the SDS. All of these can be downloaded and printed.

Legal disputes related to pesticides and pesticide drift

If a neighbor files a formal complaint about pesticide damage with PDA, an inspector will come out to investigate and document the situation. All pesticide applicators are legally obligated to share their pesticide records with PDA upon request.

If you are facing a legal dispute related to pesticides or pesticide drift, there are resources available to help farmers through Farm Bureau. Call the PA Farm Bureau at 717-761-2740 and ask for the Government Communications Department.

Useful Links and Information:

- Penn State Extension article "Glyphosate (Roundup): Understanding Risks to Human Health (https://extension.psu.edu/glyphosate-roundup-understanding-risks-to-human-health)"

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