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Dicamba Buffers, Training and Licensing: What to Know for 2019

Posted on December 17, 2018 by [Aaron Hager](#)

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) renewed the labels of three dicamba-containing products used in dicamba-resistant soybean varieties on October 31, 2018. These renewed labels also contain new restrictions and requirements that did not appear on the original labels. Each application must completely satisfy all label requirements and restrictions, but the following three new requirements might necessitate additional forethought and planning.

Additional in-field buffers

Fields that exist in counties that might harbor endangered terrestrial dicot plant species must have an in-field, 57-foot omnidirectional buffer. The new 57-foot buffer will occur on three sides of the field and be in addition to the required 110-foot downwind buffer. Non-sensitive areas, as defined in the renewed labels, can be included in the omnidirectional buffer calculation. This new buffer requirement includes fields in at least 29 Illinois counties (Figure 1).

Training requirement

Approximately 11,000 individuals in Illinois completed the label-mandated auxin training prior to applying these dicamba products in 2018. Some have mistakenly assumed this particular training had to be completed only once, but the dicamba training must be completed every year. Prior to the 2018 application season, dozens of face-to-face training sessions were held around the state, but it appears there will be fewer of these offered prior to the 2019 application season. An option to complete the training via on-line modules likely will become available.

Licensing requirements

EPA mandates that only certified applicators (not operators) are allowed to purchase and apply these dicamba-containing products. This requirement applies to both private and commercial applicators. Historically, licensed operators working under the direct supervision of a licensed applicator have done the majority of pesticide applications in Illinois but this is no longer permissible with the dicamba formulations applied to dicamba-resistant soybean. According to the Illinois Pesticide Act for commercial applicators: "A person may make application to the Director to become licensed as a licensed commercial applicator...only after successfully demonstrating comprehension of the general competency standards and one or more of the technical category areas of pesticide use." The Illinois Department of Agriculture requires Field Crops as the technical category for application of dicamba to dicamba-resistant soybean. Additionally for private applicators: "A person may become certified or recertified as a private applicator by: 1) attending a training session conducted by the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service which has been approved by or is in cooperation with the Department and by successful completion of a written, closed book, competency examination; or 2) in lieu of attendance at a training session, successfully complete a written closed book examination. The closed book examination will consist of questions pertinent to general competency standards for which a correct answer is to be selected for each question from multiple choice answers."

Figure 1.

