



PESTICIDE HANDLER TRAINING FOR THE USEPA WORKER PROTECTION STANDARD (WPS)

The EPA's Agricultural Worker Protection Standard (WPS), originally revised in 2015 and implemented in 2017, remains in effect today with additional updates, including changes to Application Exclusion Zone (AEZ) requirements finalized in 2024. This document reflects current expectations for agricultural retailers.

Please review the USEPA "How to Comply" Manual for full details:

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-worker-safety/pesticide-worker-protection-standard-how-comply-manual>

WHO MUST BE TRAINED

The WPS requires employers to protect two types of agricultural employees: workers and handlers.

A handler is anyone who is:

1. Employed for compensation by an agricultural or commercial pesticide handling establishment, and
2. Performing any of the following tasks:
 - Mixing, loading, transferring, applying or disposing of pesticides
 - Handling opened pesticide containers; cleaning or disposing of containers according to labeling
 - Acting as a flagger
 - Cleaning, adjusting, handling or repairing pesticide equipment
 - Assisting with pesticide application
 - Entering enclosed spaces before ventilation criteria are met
 - Entering treated areas to adjust/remove coverings (e.g., tarps)
 - Performing crop advising during applications or restricted-entry intervals

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Handlers must be trained annually before performing any pesticide handling tasks. Training must use EPA-approved materials and must be documented.

Certified applicators are exempt from WPS handler training requirements. Certified or licensed crop advisors may be exempt from certain requirements if they have received equivalent training and are acting within the crop advisor exemption. All other handlers, including licensed operators, must be trained.

TRAINERS

Training must be conducted by a person qualified under WPS, including:

- A person currently certified as an applicator of restricted-use pesticides
- A person who has completed an EPA-approved Train-the-Trainer program
- A person designated as a trainer by EPA or the responsible state, federal, or tribal agency

REQUIRED TRAINING CONTENT

1. Format and meaning of pesticide labels, including safety information
2. Health hazards of pesticides (acute, chronic, delayed effects, sensitization)
3. Routes of exposure
4. Signs and symptoms of pesticide poisoning
5. Emergency first aid procedures
6. How to obtain emergency medical care
7. Routine and emergency decontamination procedures (including eye flushing)
8. Need for and proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE)
9. Prevention and treatment of heat-related illness
10. Safe handling, transport, storage, and disposal of pesticides
11. Environmental concerns (drift, runoff, wildlife hazards)
12. Prevention of take-home pesticide exposure
13. Employer responsibilities under WPS (including PPE, training, decontamination, and anti-retaliation protections)

Note: All WPS training materials must be approved by EPA and include an EPA publication number.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Application Exclusion Zone (AEZ)

EPA updated AEZ requirements effective December 2024. Employers must ensure pesticide applications do not occur when people are within the AEZ and must suspend applications if people enter the AEZ. Refer to current EPA guidance for specific distances and conditions.

Respirator Requirements

If required by the pesticide label, handlers must comply with both WPS and OSHA respiratory protection requirements (29 CFR 1910.134), including:

- Medical evaluation prior to respirator use
- Annual fit testing
- Training on proper use, care, and limitations
- A written respiratory protection program

OSHA Respiratory Protection: <https://www.osha.gov/respiratory-protection>

RESOURCES

EPA WPS: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-worker-safety>

EPA Materials: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-worker-safety/worker-protection-standard-materials>

Illinois Dept. of Agriculture: <https://agr.illinois.gov/pesticides>

ILLINOIS COMPLIANCE

The Illinois Department of Agriculture enforces WPS. Inspectors may request training records, proof of EPA-approved materials, and respirator compliance documentation.

For questions, contact IFCA or the Illinois Department of Agriculture.