Pesticide safety training slated

By DICK WRIGHT
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Workers in Louisiana fields are about to get new protection from exposure to chemical poisons sprayed on crops.

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry is the state agency designated to inform farmers, pesticide handlers and workers about new regulations and enforce a manual of rules intended to prevent dangerous exposure to pesticides.

Some 85 department field inspectors will carry out inspections of farm sites and enforcement.

In February the department along with Mary Grodner, pesticide safety specialist with the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, will conduct training meetings to "train the trainers." These "trainers" can be county agents, pesticide handlers, Agriculture and Forestry personnel and farmers themselves.

After their training, these trainers are to train workers who are to benefit from the new federal Environmental Protection Agency regulations.

"In most cases they will be training farmers and handlers," Bobby Simoneaux, director of pesticide and environmental programs, said.

Farmers who want to train their own workers can attend the "train the trainer" meetings if they are qualified in pesticide use and handling, Simoneaux said.

Farmers who employ persons to work in jobs that may expose them to pesticides — either in the handling and application of them or exposure to them after they have been put on crops — are required to take a number of steps to meet the new regulations.

They can be required to have a shower for workers who need to wash off after exposure. Employers must provide protective clothing and be ready to provide emergency aid to exposed or sick workers. Worker protection rules must be posted. Pesticide labels are to show how long workers are to stay out of fields after a pesticide has been applied.

Workers also must receive training in their own language. Peter Grandi, who oversees implementation of the worker protection rules, said employers may have to bring in someone who speaks the worker's language, or in some cases work leaders may be able to conduct the training if the workers do not speak English.

As extensive as the regulations appear, they apply only to growers of plants — farms, plant nurseries, greenhouses and forestry.

The new rules do not cover workers on livestock and poultry farms, or right-of-way sprayers or mosquito sprayers or persons who treat buildings for pests.

And even the workers who are covered by the regulations do not have to get training from the first day on the job. Until 1997, workers can be on the job for 15 days before they must receive training, Grandi said. After 1997, that period is reduced to five days, he said.

Workers will get a card showing they have received pesticide protection training, and will not have to have training at every job site, he said.

Simoneaux said the department is already reaching farmers about the new regulations.

"The agriculture community is well aware of what is happening," he said.

Neither Simoneaux nor Grodner are sure how many people will attend "train the trainer" sessions. The number of workers that may be exposed to pesticides is estimated at 2,000 workers will be trained.

Training the trainers is to be finished by April 15.

Violations of the new worker protection rules carries fines.

Department of Agriculture and Forestry field inspectors, who handle a number of regulatory duties around the state, will make spot checks of farms, and they can check the worker protection setups when they visit farms for other reasons, Simoneaux said.

"Any system can be beat," he said.

Simoneaux said the department has tried to promote compliance "to educate farmers that in the long run this is a benefit to them. It should eliminate any exposure to pesticides."

Enforcement of the rules begins April 14, Simoneaux said. However, full enforcement won't occur until October 1995 because farmers may not have to comply until worker protection rules for a pesticide have appeared on container labels, he said. The law allows a period during which present stocks of pesticides that don't have worker protection instructions can be used, he said.

Pesticide labels have instructions on use and handling, and those labels have the force of law pertaining to the use of the labeled product.

Here is the schedule of "train the trainers" sessions:

- Alexandria, 1 to 4 p.m., Feb. 16, Holiday Inn on MacArthur Drive.
- Centerville (St. Mary Parish), 8 a.m. to noon Feb. 17, Knights of Columbus Hall.
- Jennings, 8 a.m. to noon Feb. 18, Multi-Purpose Building, Fairgrounds.
- Hammond, 8 a.m. to noon Feb. 22, Hammond Experiment Station.
- Minden, 8 a.m. to noon March 3, parish office.
- Rayville, 8 a.m. to noon, March 4, Rayville Civic Center.

How can you protect yourself from pesticides?

¿Cómo puede protegerse de los pesticidas?

- Stay out of areas where pesticides are being applied. If pesticides drift to where you are working, get out!

- No entre a lugares donde se están aplicando pesticidas. ¡Si el viento arrastra los pesticidas hacia donde usted está trabajando, salgase de allí!