Reading Pesticide Labels

If a chemical is used for “Pest Control”, there are certain regulations which apply to the instruction label. Labels vary in length, but all contain the same type of information (see Pesticide Fact Sheet The Pesticide Label). The label allows you to get maximum benefits with minimal risk. It will instruct you on application and will identify the active ingredient in case of a pesticide accident.

Federal law strictly defines what information manufacturers must put on pesticide labels. The label helps the state and federal governments control the distribution, storage, sale, use, and disposal of pesticides. Before a manufacturer can sell a pesticide, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) must approve its label language. In Colorado, the Department of Agriculture must accept label language before a product can be sold or used in the state.

ALWAYS READ THE ENTIRE LABEL before each step in the application of the pesticide.

Following are the contents of Pesticide labels:

- The common name – a brief name in place of a long chemical name.
- The brand name – a name the company gives the pesticide. The same pesticide can be sold by different companies under different names.
- The active ingredient – the component in the pesticides making it lethal to pests.
- The EPA registration number – a number assigned by the EPA which shows that the pesticide was approved by the EPA.
- Signal words – the words or symbols like “Caution,” “Warning,” “Danger,” or “Poison” indicating how toxic or hazardous a pesticide is.
- Precautionary statement – describes what protective clothing is necessary during application or other necessary precautions that should be taken.
- Statements of practical treatment – explains what first aid is needed if pesticide exposure has occurred.
- Directions for use – tells the consumer how to use the pesticide most efficiently.
- Storage and disposal – explains how to store and dispose of the pesticide safely.
Pesticide labels are the law!
Make sure you thoroughly understand the label instructions on selection, mixing, usage, storage, and proper disposal before you apply the pesticide. Contact the manufacturer, or local extension office for more information.

References and Resources


How To Read and Understand a Pesticide Label. Agricultural Retailers Association, Professional Applicator Institute, Professional Training Seminars, Washington, D.C.

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