

Avoid Taking 'cides



A grounds maintenance worker took pride in the corporate landscaping in his care. To keep the green lawns pest-free, he used chemicals freely. He even kept product containers handy in his truck. Busy as he was, he didn't take time to read labels before diluting pesticides. Strangely, he had trouble seeing well enough to read anyway. Then dizziness began, and skin rashes, weakness and nausea: symptoms of overexposure to pesticides. Other symptoms can include excessive sweating and saliva, vomiting or flu-like symptoms.

He had to quit his job, damaged neurologically by overexposure to pesticides.

He had been exposed to just a few of the thousands of pesticides used in our world. They are applied not only to kill weeds and insects, but also against rodents, spiders, fungus, bacteria and other living things considered to be pests.

Pesticides can get into your body through your skin or mouth, or lungs if you breathe vapors or dust. Pesticides can linger on the ground, leaves, clothing and equipment. Agricultural field workers are obviously at risk, but other occupations also present pesticide hazards.

Garbage handlers might breathe dust from an unmarked container that had stored pesticides, or recycling depot workers could unknowingly pick up objects contaminated by a leaky barrel. In the manufacturing industry, workers could breathe dust from treated wood products. Insecticides and rat poison are found in countless workplaces.

Workers should not apply pesticides without proper training.

Workers can avoid harmful levels of exposure when working near pesticides, by habits such as:

- Avoiding unmarked containers.
- Wearing a respirator when recommended, and clean protective clothing and suitable hand protection.
- Washing contaminated clothing separately, daily after work.
- Wearing eye protection when using products with labels saying "danger" or "warning."
- Washing hands, forearms and face carefully before smoking, eating, drinking or using the toilet.

If you spill a pesticide on yourself, immediately wash with soap and water and change clothing. If it's in your eyes, flush them with water for 15 minutes. Report the exposure to your supervisor.

If you are a farm worker, ask your supervisor three questions before you enter a field:

How recently has it been sprayed?

What chemical?

When is it safe to re-enter the field?

Here are some actions to avoid:

- Don't eat freshly sprayed crops.
- Never touch your mouth, rub your eyes or wear contact lenses around pesticides.
- Don't store pesticide containers near food or drink.
- Don't drink from a cup or container unless you're sure it has never held pesticides.

Off the job, you may be exposed to pesticides at home. Use only domestic pesticides, unless you are licensed to apply the more hazardous commercial products. Be certain that chemicals used on fruits and vegetables are registered for use on food plants. Consider asking gardening store consultants about organic controls of insects and weeds.

The letters c-i-d-e- mean "killer of...". Don't end up as a target of a 'cide.