Pesticide Spray Drift Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Pesticide spray drift can expose workers, nearby residents, and even entire communities to dangerous chemicals without warning. Spray drift happens when pesticide droplets or vapors move through the air during or after application, landing where they weren't intended — on people, wildlife, water sources, or other crops.

This kind of exposure can cause serious health problems like eye and skin irritation, breathing trouble, nausea, or long-term issues with the nervous system. It also contaminates areas that were never meant to be treated, creating hazards for other workers, animals, and the environment.

Even if you're not the one applying the pesticide, you could still be at risk if you're working or walking nearby. Without proper precautions, one windy day or a careless mistake can turn a routine job into a dangerous incident.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

The Pesticide spray drift happens when pesticide droplets or vapors move away from the area where they were originally applied. This drift can travel far and affect people, animals, plants, and water sources — sometimes with serious consequences.

Health and Safety Risks to Workers and Bystanders

When pesticide spray drifts into unintended areas, workers and bystanders may experience:

- **Skin and eye irritation:** Burning, stinging, or rashes from chemical contact
- **Breathing issues:** Shortness of breath, coughing, or asthma attacks from inhaling chemical particles
- **Headaches, nausea, or dizziness:** Caused by exposure to toxic chemicals without proper protection

Environmental and Operational Hazards

Spray drift doesn't just affect people — it can have wide-reaching impact on the

environment and operations:

- **Non-target plant damage:** Crops or ornamental plants not meant to be treated may be harmed or become unsafe to eat
- **Contamination of water sources:** Drift into lakes, rivers, or irrigation systems can pollute drinking or farming water
- **Wasted product and lost productivity:** When pesticide lands where it’s not needed, it’s not only ineffective – but it may also result in costly cleanup and health claims

Example: Spray drift from a nearby field settles on a schoolyard or residential area. People may unknowingly be exposed, resulting in public complaints, fines, or lawsuits for the employer.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Even if you aren’t the one applying pesticides, spray drift can still reach you. To stay safe, you need to understand the conditions that cause drift and how to avoid exposure. Always treat pesticides with care – once they’re airborne, they don’t stay where you want them.

Check the Weather Before You Spray

Weather plays a major role in spray drift. Wind speed, direction, temperature, and humidity all affect where your pesticide ends up. Spraying when the wind is strong or shifting can cause chemicals to land far from your target – and onto people, vehicles, or buildings.

Example: If you’re about to spray and the wind is blowing toward a residential area, delay your application. Wait for calmer weather or when the wind shifts away from sensitive zones.

Time Your Applications Wisely

Spraying early in the morning or late in the afternoon can reduce the risk of drift because the air is typically more stable. Avoid spraying during the hottest part of the day when rising air can carry pesticide particles upward and away.

Use the Right Nozzles and Pressure

Your equipment matters. Nozzles that create large droplets help reduce drift because heavier droplets fall to the ground faster. High-pressure sprayers can create a fine mist that’s more likely to travel long distances.

Adjust Your Technique and Distance

Keep your sprayer close to the ground when possible, especially when working near property lines, roadways, or people. Watch your spray angle and avoid applying pesticides during strong updrafts.

Wear the Proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – Just because you’re not the target of the spray doesn’t mean you’re safe. Spray drift can expose you even if you’re not the one holding the nozzle.

- Wear chemical-resistant gloves and long sleeves
- Use goggles or a face shield to protect your eyes
- Use a respirator if you’re working near drift-prone areas
- Wash exposed skin and clothing after the job

Label Awareness and Legal Buffer Zones – Always read and follow the pesticide label. It will tell you about wind speed limits, required PPE, droplet size, and minimum distance (buffer zones) to keep from sensitive areas like schools, waterways, or homes.

Key Reminders

- Never spray in wind over label limits (usually 10–15 mph max)
- Use drift-reduction nozzles and low-pressure systems
- Calibrate and clean your sprayer regularly
- Spray during stable weather conditions (no gusts or updrafts)
- Keep people, pets, and food away during and after application

FINAL WORD

Spray drift is easy to overlook but can have serious consequences. Always plan ahead, follow safety steps, and treat every application with care. A little caution goes a long way.