Protective clothing when using pesticides Meeting Kit



WHAT’S AT STAKE

Working with pesticides isn’t just about getting the job done – it’s about protecting yourself while you do it. Pesticides are designed to kill pests, but they can also harm people if they come into contact with your skin, eyes, or lungs. Without the right protective clothing, even a small spill or drift can lead to rashes, chemical burns, breathing issues, or long-term health problems. Whether you’re mixing, applying, or cleaning up, your clothing is your first line of defense. Skipping PPE might save you a few minutes – but it could cost you your health.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Pesticides are toxic by design – they’re meant to kill insects, weeds, fungi, or rodents. But those same chemicals can be extremely harmful to people if they enter the body through the skin, eyes, mouth, or lungs. Without proper protective clothing, exposure can happen quickly and with serious consequences.

Skin Absorption – The #1 Exposure Route – Most pesticide injuries happen through skin contact. Many pesticides can be absorbed through your skin and enter the bloodstream without you even noticing. Areas like your wrists, neck, and ankles are especially vulnerable if not covered properly.

- Some pesticides are fat-soluble, meaning they absorb faster through sweaty or oily skin
- Long sleeves and pants aren’t enough if the fabric is absorbent or gets saturated

Eye and Face Exposure – Splash and Drift Hazards – Mixing and pouring concentrated pesticides is especially risky. A small splash can lead to eye burns, blurred vision, or permanent damage. Wind-blown drift can also irritate or injure eyes and skin if your face isn’t protected.

- High-risk tasks: opening containers, mixing concentrates, using backpack sprayers
- Even mist or fog from applications can irritate eyes and nasal passages

Inhalation – Breathing in the Risk – Without a respirator or proper face covering, fine pesticide droplets and vapors can enter your lungs – especially during mixing or spraying in enclosed or poorly ventilated areas. This can lead to headaches, dizziness, nausea, or long-term respiratory problems.

Contaminated Clothing – Carrying the Risk Home – Clothing that gets saturated with pesticide can continue to expose your skin throughout the day – and if brought home, it can transfer chemicals to your car, laundry, or family members. Without changing or washing gear separately, the risk doesn't stop when the shift ends.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

The best way to avoid pesticide exposure is by using the right protective clothing every single time – from mixing to application to cleanup. Pesticides are powerful chemicals, and your gear is your shield. Here's how to use it right:

Wear Chemical-Resistant Clothing – Not Just Any Work Gear

Clothing should be made from chemical-resistant materials, not regular fabric like cotton or denim. Look for PPE labeled for pesticide use – including coveralls, long-sleeved jackets, pants, and aprons that are either coated or made of non-absorbent materials.

Make sure your clothing fits well and doesn't leave skin exposed around the wrists, neck, or ankles.

Example: If you're suiting up and notice a gap between your glove and your sleeve, stop and adjust. That open area is a direct path for chemical exposure.

Use the Right Gloves – Waterproof and Unlined

Always wear unlined, chemical-resistant gloves, such as nitrile or neoprene. Avoid leather, cloth, or lined gloves – they absorb pesticides and trap them against your skin. Gloves should extend beyond the wrist and be worn under your sleeves to prevent chemicals from dripping inside.

Protect Your Eyes and Face – Don't Risk a Splash

Wear safety goggles, a face shield, or full-face respirator, especially when mixing or pouring concentrates. Even a small splash can cause serious eye injuries or chemical burns.

Respiratory Protection – Block What You Can't See

Depending on the pesticide and application method, a NIOSH-approved respirator may be required. Always check the label for guidance and wear the right cartridge or filter type. Vapors and fine mist can cause lung damage over time – especially in greenhouses, spray tanks, or enclosed spaces.

Change, Clean, and Separate Work Gear

- Change clothes immediately after handling pesticides – never wear contaminated gear in your vehicle or at home

- Wash PPE separately from household laundry in hot water with detergent
- Store PPE in a designated, well-ventilated area – away from food, drinks, or personal items

Follow the Label – It’s the Law and Your Safety Net

Every pesticide label includes required PPE – read it before you begin. Don’t guess or assume what’s safe. The label tells you what protection is legally and medically necessary for that specific product.

Bonus Tip:

If you’re about to spray and the wind is blowing toward your unprotected side, stop and reposition yourself – or wait until the wind shifts. Spraying against the wind can blow pesticides directly onto your skin, face, or into your lungs, even if you’re wearing some PPE. Always work with the wind at your back and check wind direction before every application.

FINAL WORD

Pesticides are powerful tools – but they’re just as dangerous to people as they are to pests if not handled with care. The right protective clothing keeps those chemicals off your skin, out of your lungs, and away from your family. Don’t take shortcuts. Gear up properly, every time, and protect what matters most – your health.