Renew Private Pesticide Licenses Next Month

At least every two years, private pesticide applicators must attend a recertification course to maintain their ability to buy and use restricted use pesticides. In these required trainings, private applicators or PAs learn or review legal updates put forward by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) Office of Pesticide Management, safety topics such as personal protection wear and glove selection and pesticide handling and disposal, and new technologies that are emerging.

Private Applicators who need recertification (private licenses run out on December 31 on any given year) can recertify next month. The Smyth County VCE Office will be holding recertification courses on Monday, November 18 at 6 PM and again on Wednesday, Nov 20 at 8:15 AM. Both meetings will be held at the Smyth County Extension Office, 121 Bagley Circle, Suite 434 (4th Floor) in Marion.

Please note that these meetings pertain to private license holders only. If you have a commercial license or if you do not have a license, but wish to earn one, we can assist you with that need during normal office hours. Commercial recertifications are available online and we can proctor private testing right here at our office.

When we talk of pesticides, it occurs to me that most people are not trained in the proper handling of pesticides, understand the differences in pesticides, or even understand the meaning of the word “pesticide.” Many times, people refer to pesticides in a very narrow fashion when just the opposite is the case.

The word “pesticide” means just what it says…the control of a pest. Within the envelope of pesticides there exists many difference “cides” and many different forms and functions within those subgroups. Insecticides control insects, rodenticides control rodents, herbicides control plants, and fungicides control fungi. That seems simple enough but as you can imagine in my line of work, I see people daily trying to use one “cide” to control the target of another.

Another issue with pesticide is people seeking to avoid them altogether without realizing that the term applies to everyday essentials of life. For example, soap is a pesticide. Even soap that isn’t anti-bacterial removed potential disease-causing situations by removing dirt and grime where bacteria and molds can grow. That said, if soap is a pesticide, then surely one can see that hand sanitizer is definitely a pesticide.

The problem with using a pesticide is full knowledge of the problem that exists. For example, many blights are fungal in nature. Spores from a grown fungus are carried in the air and they find a host plant to invade. With that, it makes sense that a fungicidal agent be used to control the blight. Fire blight in our fruit and ornamental tree; however, is bacterial in origin and calls for the administration of an antibiotic. Applying a fungicide to fire blight is not only improper, it introduces an agent for which there is no need.

The same can be said for probably the most commonly misused pesticide category, herbicides. There are literally thousands of formulations and functions within the herbicide family and their effect, targets and the probability for the product to drift off target varies greatly. Along that line, there are a great many on-line resources that seek to lead people to believe that a “safer” alternative exists.

A good example of this is the idea of using vinegar and salt as a “safe” weed treatment. First of all, it is toxic to some plants, or it wouldn’t control them. What is left out of the conversation is that since you are using two food grade products there is a misleading believe that this is safer when the reality is that vinegar and salt sprayed at concentrations high enough to kill vegetation can be highly poisonous to mammals, especially dogs and cats.

Pets, like their human owners, love salt and, also like their human owners, too much salt is a bad thing. The trouble is the threshold for lethal salt intake is much lower in dogs and cats. This danger is expressed in a common pesticide test called LD 50.

LD 50 stands for Lethal Dose, 50%. It pinpoints that amount of material, or the dose if you will, at which point 50% of the affected population dies. Research has shown that the LD 50 for vinegar and salt is 2000 times smaller than some of the pesticides it seeks to replace, namely glyphosate. In other words, if a single pound of salt would kill a pet, it would take a full ton of herbicide to do the same harm. When it comes to LD 50s, less equals more lethal…. a smaller dose is needed to kill 50%.

In the end, when it comes to anything in our lives, dilution is the solution to pollution. Keeping things in balance and not overusing a product will always be the best pathway forward.

Upcoming Events

Oct 30 Pesticide Take Up, SuperGro of VA, 710 Lee Hwy, Marion

Nov 5 VQA Sale 7pm Be advised the old call in number may be unavailable

Nov 11 VQA Steer Take Up

Nov 13 VQA Heifer Take Up

Nov 18 Private Pesticide Recertification Course, Extension Office 6 PM

Nov 20 Private Pesticide Recertification Course, Extension Office 8 AM

Dec 2 VQA Sale

Jan 7, 2025 VQA Sale

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodation to participate in this activity, please contact Andy Overbay or Pam Testerman at 276-706-8339 /TDD (800) 828-1120) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.

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