



For Immediate Release

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WSSA Pesticide Stewardship Series: Certification Programs Fulfill an Essential Need for Competent Pesticide Applicators

LAWRENCE, Kansas – February 1, 2013 – Recently, an employee of an aerial application company was penalized for applying an agricultural pesticide without following all label directions and without the required applicator certification. In a separate case, a forest service company making an urban application was also fined for pesticide label violations and lack of certification.

Certain pesticide products must be applied by or under the direct supervision of specially trained and certified applicators. The most recent statistics indicate that there are 414,000 commercial and 481,000 private applicators certified in the United States.

Certification and training programs are conducted by states, territories and tribes in accordance with national standards. All certified applicators are trained in fundamental (core) principles of pesticide use - basic knowledge such as proper use of application equipment, potential application hazards, mixing instructions, protective clothing and equipment, applicable state and federal pesticide laws and regulations, interpretation of pesticide labels, effective integrated pest management techniques and more. The National Association of State Departments of Agriculture Research Foundation (NASDARF) will begin revising the [current national core manual](#) later this year.

In addition to passing the core exam, certified commercial applicators (and in some cases certified private applicators) must pass one or more category certification exams. For example, aerial applicators might be required to pass one category exam in aerial methods and another in the specialty in which they will work, such as agricultural plants or aquatic areas.

The number of certification categories depends on the state. The diversity of categories shows that different expertise is needed for different kinds of pesticide use, such as agricultural plants, aerial, aquatic, food manufacturing and processing, forestry, fumigation, household, interior landscaping, ornamentals, pet grooming, public health, rights-of-way, schools, seed treatment, sewer, turf, water sanitation and wood-destroying organisms.

Who needs to be certified to apply pesticides? The answer varies by state. “In Virginia, with limited exceptions, any person who uses or supervises the use of any pesticide in exchange for compensation of any kind must be certified as a commercial applicator,” says Liza Fleeson, program manager for the Office of Pesticide Services, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. “In addition, private applicators who apply [restricted use pesticides](#) for the purpose of producing an agricultural commodity, on property owned or leased by them or their employer, must be certified.”

Certified applicators must understand their own state’s certification and recertification requirements, as well as the types of certification (commercial, private, etc.) and certification categories available. If certified applicators apply pesticides in multiple states, they must know what other states, if any, recognize their state’s certified applicator status for the specific category of use.

Here are a few examples of state-level certification and training requirements:

- New York certifies individuals as commercial pesticide applicators, private pesticide applicators and commercial pesticide technicians. Commercial pesticide technicians apply restricted use pesticides under the supervision of a commercial applicator and, with additional training and/or experience, can become commercial pesticide applicators themselves.
- Some states require that certain pesticide businesses have their own registered technician training program. In Kansas, every pesticide business that applies pesticides to control wood-destroying, structural, ornamental, turf or interior landscape pests is required to have a registered technician training program for any uncertified applicators they employ.
- Some states require certification of everyone applying a pesticide (restricted or general use) in certain categories. For example, Wisconsin requires certification of anyone who applies or directs the use of pesticides in public schools, on school grounds or in aquatic environments.

More than 40 states post their lists of currently certified commercial and private applicators on the Web. Depending on the type and category of applicator, many states require additional training and/or recertification after a specified timeframe.

Comprehensive training by the [Pesticide Safety Education Program](#) and other approved entities is essential prior to the initial certification and recertification of pesticide applicators by state regulatory agencies. “Proper pesticide use is continually impacted by new research, new products and new pest management best practices,” Fleeson notes. “Pesticide safety education programs are integral to the ongoing competency of certified pesticide applicators and must be sufficiently funded and staffed.”

If you have questions about certification of applicators, contact your [State Pesticide Regulatory Agency](#) or [Cooperative Extension Service](#).

This is the sixth in a series on pesticide stewardship sponsored by the Weed Science Society of America. Next month: Personal Protective Equipment.

About the Weed Science Society of America

The Weed Science Society of America, a nonprofit scientific society, was founded in 1956 to encourage and promote the development of knowledge concerning weeds and their impact on the environment. The Weed Science Society of America promotes research, education and extension outreach activities related to weeds, provides science-based information to the public and policy makers, fosters awareness of weeds and their impact on managed and natural ecosystems, and promotes cooperation among weed science organizations across the nation and around the world. For more information, visit www.wssa.net

Some Resources on Certified Applicators (always check your state’s specific regulations):

- <http://www.epa.gov/oppfead1/safety/applicators/applicators.htm> US Environmental Protection Agency
- http://www.ksda.gov/pesticides_fertilizer/content/170 Kansas Department of Agriculture
- <http://www.nj.gov/dep/enforcement/pcp/bpo-appcom.htm> New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
- <http://www.dec.ny.gov/permits/209.html> New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
- <http://www.ncagr.gov/SPCAP/pesticides/license.htm> North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- <http://ag.utah.gov/divisions/plant/pesticide/applicators.html> Utah Department of Agriculture and Food
- <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pesticides/certification.shtml> Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- <http://ipcm.wisc.edu/pat/certification> University of Wisconsin