



Pesticide safety starts with the label

Byline: Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

When it comes to growing crops, pesticides are a vital tool.

Pesticides, commonly known as crop protection or pest control products in Canada, play an important role on farms across the country. They enable farmers to put food on tables thanks to healthy and plentiful crops.

However, using any pesticide product comes with a responsibility to ensure it's used correctly and safely.

“When it comes to pesticides, the crop protection industry works to support products being made, transported, and used in a safe way,” says Erin McGregor, stewardship and policy manager for Syngenta Canada. “Ensuring that pesticides are used correctly is a priority and integral to the protection of not only the health and safety of farm workers and the public, but also the environment. Syngenta is committed to the responsible and ethical management of our products throughout their life cycle.”

So, what's the critical first step in safely using pesticides? Reading and understanding the pesticide product label. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

The importance of reading pesticide labels

Before handling any pesticide, it's crucial that you carefully read the product's label, which provides detailed information on how to use the product.

A pesticide product label is a legal document that must be followed. That means products should not be used in any way other than outlined on the label.

A pesticide label includes vital information on a specific product, such as the degree and nature of hazard posed by the product, the application rate, first aid procedures, required personal protective equipment (PPE), and more.

According to [Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Authority](#), the authority responsible for pesticide regulation in Canada, pesticides can be used safely by following the label directions. The text on the label reflects the results of the scientific evaluation



that the product has undergone and specifies the correct use of the product to prevent unacceptable risks to human health and the environment.

Even when working with a product that you've used before, review the label before use. It's not uncommon for labels to be updated, for example with changes to a product's directions for use, precautions, or pre-harvest intervals.

Understanding label information

There's a lot of information on a pesticide label but for good reason – to support the safe use of the product. That's why it's critical to carefully review the label and understand each section before working with a product to ensure you use it correctly. If you have questions or difficulty understanding the label, reach out to your local agronomic representative or pesticide specialist or contact the pesticide manufacturer for help. Health Canada's Pest Management Information Service (1-800-267-6315) is also available for questions.

Some of the information found on a pesticide label includes:

- Precautionary shapes, signal words, and hazard symbols
- First aid instructions
- Precaution statements
- PPE requirements
- Directions for use
- Restricted entry intervals, pre-harvest intervals, and other restrictions
- Storage and disposal instructions
- Registration number
- Product company's name and address

It is important to note the Pest Control Product Act's registration number. This unique five-digit product identifier, which Health Canada issues, will help a medical professional provide the necessary treatment in an emergency.

For more detailed information about understanding a pesticide product's label, check out [this video](#).



Pesticides and personal protective equipment

Protecting yourself by wearing the appropriate PPE is essential to safely using pesticides.

PPE is equipment or clothing worn to protect pesticide users and other workers from contact with pesticides or pesticide residues. It may include aprons, coveralls, footwear, gloves, protective eyewear, and respirators.

Pesticides are not all made equally, so it's critical to carefully read and follow product labels to ensure you use the proper PPE. Different PPE may be required for various tasks – such as pesticide mixing, loading, application, cleanup, and entry into a treated area – and this information will be clearly outlined on the product label. What's more, PPE requirements can vary for different pesticides since products differ in their safety requirements. So if you're handling more than one pesticide product, choose the most protective PPE from the product labels.

But remember that PPE is only effective when used correctly!

Since you must understand all that is included on a pesticide product label, if you ever have questions about something on a label, don't hesitate to reach out to the company that registered the product or Health Canada's Pest Management Information Service (1-800-267-6315).

With pesticides, the product label isn't just a guideline. Following pesticide labels to protect human health and the environment will help ensure your safety and the safety of others while also protecting your crops.

After all, our agricultural industry can only be sustainable when the products we use are well-understood and well-handled.

For more farm safety information, visit agsafetyweek.ca.

Every year, CASA raises awareness about the importance of safety on Canadian farms through Canadian Agricultural Safety Week (CASW), which takes place during the third week of March. In 2024, CASW takes place March 10-16, and is sponsored by CN, Syngenta Canada, Canadian Canola Growers Association, Fertilizer Canada, and Parrish & Heimbecker.