

Pesticide safety

I just started a position that will require me to apply pesticides on turf in and around our school's athletic field complex. My background is working on landscape crews, mostly mowing and edging. My only pesticide experience has been bug sprays that I have used around my house and in my yard. Can you offer some advice so that I am on the right track? Where should I go to get some help? Is there a list of products I can or can't use?

Florida

Thanks for your e-mail. This is a subject that is a little difficult to thoroughly address in a brief response. A local resource would greatly benefit you. The best place to start is your local county extension office. You should also consider joining any local organizations (e.g., an STMA Chapter) that will provide you some great contacts. Also, your local chemical representatives and the various product distributors are often very knowledgeable on their products and if there are any general limitations to their use in the area. But, I would not stop there for a number of reasons.

First, there can be so many different levels of rules, regulations, ordinances, and laws that govern pesticides for any given location and/or situation. For starters, each state may have different laws concerning pesticides. So if you are new to a state or new to "applying pesticides," it is important that you find out a little more about your state requirements, particularly as it relates to licenses.

Most states have a bureau or department that establishes regulations concerning pesticide use. If the county employees do not have specific information for you, they can at least put you in touch with proper agency. For instance, in Florida we have the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). Within this agency, there is the Bureau of Entomology & Pest Control and the Pesticide Certification Office. These agencies operate under a specific act or law that establishes which license you need based on a long list of criteria. The county extension service can provide assistance in determining what kind of pesticide license you need, qualifications for the license, examination requirements, fees, etc.

The county extension office may also be able to help you with local ordinances. In addition, some school districts have developed their own policies related to pesticide use. These are often more restrictive than the state's laws or

local ordinances. These laws, ordinances, and rules may govern the types of products used as well as the how, when, and where of their use. Many of Florida's school districts have developed very detailed rules related to pesticides. For instance, most (if not all) Florida schools forbid teachers from having commercial cans of insect sprays in their classroom. It is often a policy to not use any restricted use pesticides. This is also important to know since it may change the type of license you need.

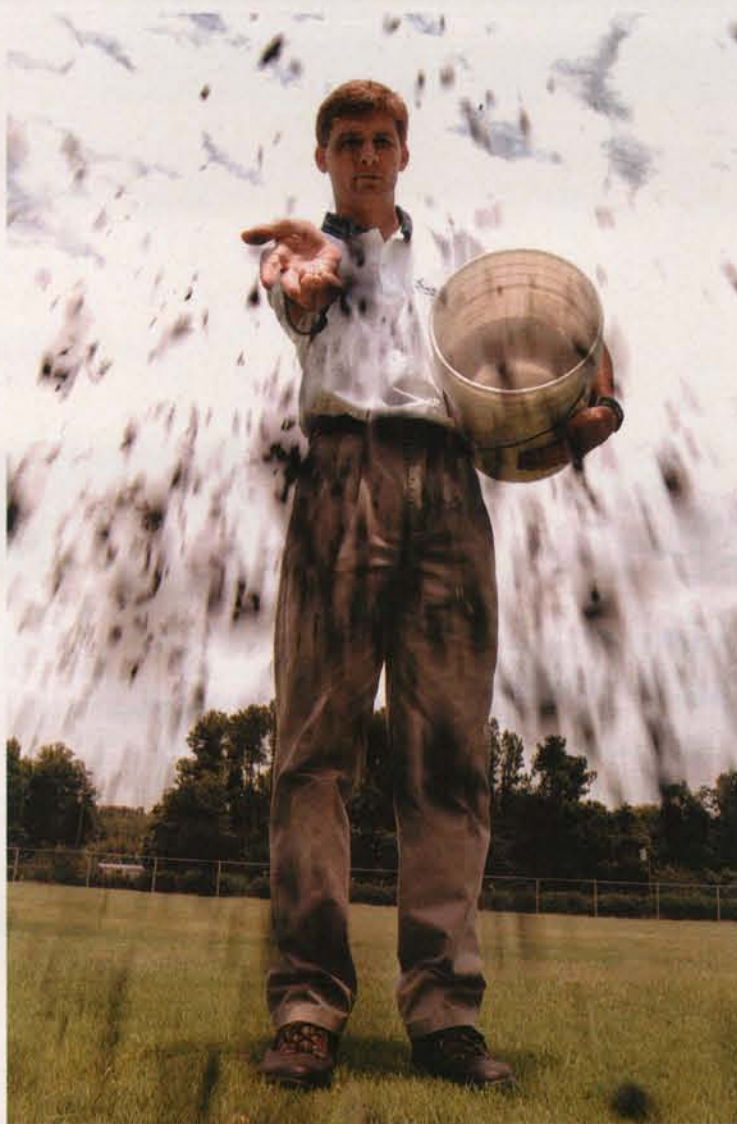
To be safe I would make a few written inquiries to the school district and my immediate supervisor asking for any current policies related to chemicals. I would want these policies in writing so that they are on file. You should make your employees aware of these policies. At some point you may also be asked

by a parent, so you and your employees should be familiar with the policies. It is always better to be safe. You should make sure that you are on the mailing lists that will provide you updates related to chemical use, storage, and disposal around the facility you work.

From your e-mail it is obvious that your school has sprayed in the past, but it is probably safe to say that most schools do not want to spray anymore than what is considered necessary. In Florida's climate it is virtually impossible to maintain turf pest-free without at least some occasional pesticide use. Over time you will have to determine what is acceptable in terms of pests. You may have to remind people that insects can degrade the condition of a field to an unsafe level or that some weeds can result in unstable footing that could lead to an injury.

I would also suggest that you use good Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques to minimize pesticide use. A good turf management program will utilize good cultural practices that can reduce pesticide use. So, make sure you are comfortable with the other turf management aspects, in addition to pesticide use.

Most of today's citizens are generally not in favor of pesticides being sprayed, especially if it is around their children. I believe people that use pesticides are obligated to learn all they can about the products they use. Keep abreast of newer, safer products. You knowledge is the key to your safety and the safety of those that use your fields. **ST**



QUESTIONS? Send them to Grady Miller at the University of Florida, PO Box 110670, Gainesville, FL 32611, or email gmliller@mail.ifas.ufl.edu. Or, send them to Dave Minner at Iowa State University, 106 Horticulture Hall, Ames, IA 50011, or email dminner@iastate.edu.