



Six fundamentals of safe pesticide storage

Following these basic rules of thumb is the equivalent of cheap and effective insurance policy.

“When you gamble with safety, you bet your life.”

As this saying reminds, safety is an area where the importance of doing things right is hard to overstate. In the case of farm management, of the most critical areas of safety is the proper storage of agricultural products such as pesticides.

Many producers don't need a reminder of this importance. They just think how they would feel if they had a chemical spill or fire from their on-farm storage, or if their family, employees or neighbours were accidentally exposed to pesticides on their farm.

To prevent those accidents, regularly reviewing the basics of safe product storage is a good habit to get into, says Vivianne Servant, Pesticide Certification Specialist with Alberta Environment. “Put it this way: safe pesticide storage is not something you want to learn by accident. Doing it right is an essential part of good planning and good farm management.”

Don't learn safety by accident

For a thorough approach to on farm pesticide storage, Servant recommends that producers complete a farmer pesticide training course, such as the one in Alberta offered through Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD).

She helped develop and update that ARD course, which is now available online at no cost. (Go to www.agric.gov.ab.ca and search “Farmer Pesticide Training Certificate Course” for details.) In her role with Alberta Environment, Servant also oversees and approves all the training for commercial pesticide applicators.

Additional options include talking to farm advisors, including pesticide manufacturers, and taking advantage of some of the educational resources available. Information available through Environmental Farm Plan efforts is a particularly good resource (for Alberta EFP information, visit www.albertaefp.com), as is information available through industry organizations such as CropLife Canada (www.croplife.ca), which offers empty pesticide container collection through its CleanFarms program (www.cleanfarms.ca).

Each of these sources reinforce the same basic approaches. Here's a snapshot of six of the key fundamentals:

1. Minimize what you need to store. The first question farmers should ask themselves is whether they need to store at all, says Servant. “If you can keep what you store to a minimum that is the best way to reduce risk. Look hard at exactly how much you need and just buy that quantity. It may not always be possible, but the more you can do that, the better.”

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2. Secure your storage. Another key focus is the security of any stored pesticide. “Pesticides should be stored in a place where they’re completely separated from the other activities that happen on the farm,” says Servant. “That means not just isolated storage but secured isolated storage. Make sure your storage area is locked to prevent public access and so children or even animals on the farm don’t have access to it.”

3. Think environmental protection. Environmental considerations top the list of where to locate storage, she says. “Water protection is number one. Make sure your storage isn’t in an area that could contaminate either surface water or groundwater if a spill were to occur. You need good separation from all water sources.”

4. Have spill containment in place. If there were to be a spill, the best line of defence is to have good spill containment in place before it happens. “This is as simple as having a tray or pan under the stored product,” says Servant. “Having everything on a non-absorbant surface is another good step.”

5. Develop an emergency plan. Planning ahead also the key to managing an emergency situation, she says. “What would happen if there was a fire or a major spill?” There are many considerations, including ones specific to pesticides. “For example, if there’s a fire involving pesticides, some of the fumes can be very toxic.”

In Alberta, a good resource is the Rural Emergency Plan available through the Alberta Environmental Farm Plan website or directly at www.ruralemergencyplan.com. “It provides a do-it-yourself process to have a plan ready,” says Servant. “It’s something I would recommend every Alberta farmer have in place.”


6. Practice safe disposal. Safe handling and storage should accommodate the full life cycle of the product container, says Servant. That means ensuring safe disposal once the containers are used. “Your vendor may handle this for you. Or you may want to use the container collection program available through CropLife Canada’s CleanFarm program. The important thing is to not keep used containers on-farm.”

The skinny on bulk

Safe pesticide storage is arguably even more critical today with bulk containers becoming more common.

“A spill from a bulk container will result in much more product being spilled than a spill from a standard sized pesticide container, so farmers should take precautions to minimize that risk,” says Servant.

The same fundamentals for safe storage of small containers apply to bulk ones. However, larger spill trays or containment areas, and locking of valves on the bulk containers to prevent accidental spills, are required. Because bulk containers are typically refillable and used over a longer period of time, there is also potential increased risk of container breakdown.

“Factors such as exposure to weathering are important to consider,” says Servant. “Keep them out of the elements, check their condition regularly and talk to your suppliers to make sure they are checking and it’s on their mind as well. You want to make sure any container you are storing is in good shape and stays that way.” 

Note to Alberta producers: For Growing Forward opportunities check www.GrowingForward.Alberta.ca.

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