

# AGROCHEMICALS ON YOUR FARM: SPILLS

Man-Made and Technological Threats



Proper use and application of agrochemicals can aid in agricultural tasks, however precautions must be taken to prevent chemical accidents or spills that can affect the individual, community and environment. It is important to be well prepared in case of a spill.

## Agrochemical Spill Prevention

- **Always read packaging labels for information on their proper use, handling and actions in case of spills.**
- **Use original or appropriate containers to store and transport chemicals.**
- **After using application equipment,**
  - Make sure valves are closed, hoses are empty, and pumps are turned off.
- **Clean equipment frequently,**
  - Especially before switching to a new mix.
- **Inspect equipment routinely for damage that could cause a leak.**
  - Keep a record of these inspections and repairs.

## Have a Spill Response Plan

- **Develop a plan for responding to spills. This should include:**
  - Emergency phone numbers to call should a spill occur – include your state's agrochemical hotline.
  - An inventory of chemical products on your farm, include any protective equipment.
  - A copy of the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for all chemicals on your farm.
  - Evacuation plans for the room or building containing chemicals.
  - Instructions for containing and cleaning up spills. You may need separate instructions for different chemicals.
- **Keep response supplies organized and readily accessible.**
- **Plan for the proper disposal of cleaned up materials, including any tools or clothing used.**
  - Discuss the plan with any farm employees.
- **Post signs with chemical spill response procedures.**

## Reporting Spills

- **Chemical spills are reportable in most states, and may be at the federal level. In the event of a spill:**
  - Contact your state agriculture or environmental agency.
  - Information may also be reported to the National Response Center [1-800-424-8802 or <http://www.nrc.uscg.mil/nrchp.html>] or the National Pesticide Information Center [1-800-858-7378 or <http://npic.orst.edu/mlr.html>].

## Responding to Spills

- **Follow the 3 C's: Caution, Control/Contain, Clean up!**
- **Caution: Personal Safety.**
  - Do not expose yourself unnecessarily to chemicals.
  - Avoid situations where you may become trapped.
  - Wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as rubber gloves, boots, long sleeves, long pants; use additional PPE as instructed by the label.
  - Approach the spill from a safe direction (e.g., upwind, upstream).
  - Avoid spills that are reacting (hissing • bubbling • smoking • gassing • burning). Evacuate and call 911.
  - If you have been contaminated, wash with running water at least 15 minutes.
  - If others have been contaminated and are still able to walk, help them to wash. Wash yourself when you finish.
  - If anyone has become incapacitated, call 911.
- **Control the source/Contain the spill.**
  - If possible, **safely** stop the spill (e.g., place a leaking container in a larger container, close a valve), immediately!
  - Keep the spill from spreading by using absorbent material, sandbags or by digging a trench to contain fluid.
  - If the spill is too big for one person to control and clean up, call 911 or your local emergency number.
  - Evacuate the area; set up barriers to keep people (and animals) out.
  - Stay with the spill site until someone relieves you.
- **Clean up.**
  - For general spills:
    - Spread absorbent material (fine sand, vermiculite, clay, pet litter) on the spill area.
    - Avoid using sawdust. Strong oxidizing chemicals can combust and be a potential fire hazard.
    - Sweep and scoop all material; work from the outside toward the inside to reduce further spread.
    - Scoop material into a steel or fiber drum lined with a heavy duty plastic bag.
    - Repeat until the spill is soaked up.
    - Seal the bag. Double bag it, label it clearly and dispose of it properly.
  - Some chemicals (e.g., organophosphates) may require special handling. Check the product label for more information.
  - For spills on soil:
    - Apply activated charcoal immediately for minor spills.
    - For larger spills, the top 2-3 inches of soil must be removed and properly disposed of; then cover the area with at least 2 inches of lime and fresh top soil.

*Development of this educational material was by the Center for Food Security and Public Health with funding from the Multi-State Partnership for Security in Agriculture MOU-2010-HSEMD-004. June 2010.*