How to Handle Pesticide Spills

Accidents happen. When an accident happens with a pesticide it is especially important to be prepared. Always read the label before buying and using a pesticide. Be prepared to handle a pesticide spill before you handle a pesticide.

Prevent Spills
First, do everything you can do to prevent a spill or pesticide accident. Never handle pesticides in a kitchen or high-traffic areas. Keep others away from where you are mixing and applying the pesticide, especially children and pets. Mix the pesticide outdoors or in a well-ventilated area.

Be Prepared
The pesticide label may give you specific information on how to handle a spill. If it doesn’t, here are some recommendations. You should be wearing the personal protective equipment and clothing before you open the pesticide to mix and apply it. To be prepared for a spill, have rubber gloves, rubber or plastic foot coverings and protective eyewear ready to put on, if you are not already wearing them.

Have dry absorbent material available ahead of time to soak up spilled pesticide. This can be material such as cat litter (best), sawdust, sweeping compound, newspapers or paper towels. These materials can also be used to clean up other spills such as paints, solvents and fuels.

Have local emergency phone numbers near your telephone. Have these numbers written large enough so that you can see them with uncorrected vision. Pesticides have an emergency phone number(s) on the label. Write this number down ahead of time, along with the product name. If you need this information in an emergency and you need to read the label, they may be hard to find or too small to read in a hurry or may be obscured or otherwise unreadable.

If you spill formulated pesticide product on you, or a large amount of mixed spray, remove your clothes and shower immediately.

Follow the 3 C’s
If you have a pesticide spill, follow the three C’s: 1) Control, 2) Contain, 3) Clean Up.
- Control the spill. If a pesticide container, sprayer, bag or spreader tips over, quickly set it upright to keep more pesticide from spilling out.
- Contain the spill. Keep spilled liquid material from spreading by covering it with absorbent material, such as soil, sand, sawdust, peat moss, rags, paper towels, newspaper or cat litter.
- Clean up the spill right away. Absorb liquids with cat litter, soil, peat moss, paper towels, newspapers or sawdust. Carefully sweep up or collect the absorbent material. Put these pesticide-contaminated materials in a plastic bag.

To clean up the spill, wear chemical-resistant gloves to handle the spilled pesticide and clean-up materials. If you need to leave the spill to get help or if you have spilled a dust formulation, put absorbent materials on the spill or cover it. Block access to the spill. Keep children and pets away from the spill. If you spill a liquid, consider the need to dike the spill so that it will not run off to other areas. Do not wash down spills with water.

Spread absorbent materials on the spill. Sweep or scoop this material up and put it into a heavy-duty or doubled plastic bag.
Next, clean the area with heavy-duty detergent or bleach. Use as little liquid as possible. Don’t rinse this away. Absorb this material also and place it into the plastic bag and seal it. Place the bag in the trash. Many pesticides, especially organophosphate insecticides (e.g. malathion, diazinon, chlorpyriphos), can be neutralized with household bleach. Remember that bleach can be hazardous, and it is also a pesticide. If you use bleach, first absorb the spill, as explained above, and then use the bleach. Use only the amount of bleach you may need to cover the spill. Soak up the bleach with absorbent material also. Again, don’t wash down the spill area with water.

Any and all materials used to clean up the spill must be properly disposed of, including the broom. Small quantities of spilled homeowner pesticides and clean-up materials can be placed into a heavy-duty plastic bag and securely sealed and disposed of in household trash.

Don’t forget to wash off or decontaminate any clothing or equipment that gets pesticide on it. After you clean up the spill, wash your hands and any exposed areas of your skin with soap and plenty of water. Shower if necessary. If you get a small amount of diluted pesticide on your clothing, you can wash this clothing separately from other family laundry with a heavy-duty detergent. If you spill formulated product on your clothing you may need to dispose of this clothing along with clean-up materials. Wrap contaminated tools and empty pesticide containers in several layers of newspaper and place in the trash.

If you or someone else is directly exposed to a pesticide, wash the pesticide off the skin with plenty of water for at least 15 to 20 minutes. Get medical attention as soon as possible.

Remember: Read the label first, and BE PREPARED!

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