

Safety Note #114

## BASIC PESTICIDE EXPOSURE AWARENESS



Photograph Courtesy of Hopland REC

Information available from the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) indicates approximately 4,000 agricultural field workers suffered illness or injury from exposure to pesticide residues between 1982 and 2004. The number of pesticide residue illnesses or injuries has decreased from about 250 per year during the 1980s to an average of 65 since 2000. This decrease (roughly 75%) in cases of pesticide residue exposure may be attributed, in part, to a greater awareness of pesticide hazards by agricultural field workers and their supervisors coupled

with decreases in the use of particularly harmful pesticides.

DPR data from 2004 indicates about 38% of pesticide exposures occurred at farms and crop or livestock processing facilities. Other locations where pesticide exposure frequently happened included service establishments such as restaurants or laundries (16%), schools (9%), and medical facilities (8%). In addition, more than 90% of the 2004 exposures to workers that handle pesticides were to pesticide applicators (68%) and mixers/loaders (25%). During 2004, 35% of California occupational cases of pesticide exposure were to agricultural field workers and pesticide residue exposures to field workers occurred most frequently with grapes followed by broccoli and oranges.

### Working Safely With Pesticides

Although there is a risk of pesticide exposure when handling pesticides or entering areas where pesticides have been used, the risk may be reduced to a negligible level by becoming knowledgeable about working safely with pesticides and following good work practices as described below:

- Working safely with pesticides requires an awareness and understanding of how pesticides can enter the body (i.e. routes of exposure).
- Always use personal protective equipment appropriate for the type and concentration of pesticide to be used and the manner in which the pesticide is applied.
- Follow the directions on the pesticide label including those that describe personal protective equipment.
- Only certified applicators may use or supervise the use of those pesticides classified by the EPA as “restricted use pesticides” or by California as “restricted materials.”
- California Code of Regulations Title 3, Sections 6736 and 6764 discuss the use of coveralls and agricultural field worker training, respectively. Title 8, Section 3382 describes when hand protection, such as chemical-resistant gloves, is to be used.
- Further information about pesticide glove use, selecting appropriate pesticide protective clothing, and agricultural field worker training is available in Safety Notes [#7](#), [#67](#), and [#73](#), respectively.
- The DPR Pesticide Safety Information Series is available for downloading or reviewing online at: <http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/whs/psisenglish.htm>.