3.1 Introduction to the Label Script

Pesticide manufacturers use the label to communicate to the pesticide users. The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) reviews and approves all product labeling. If the information changes, the EPA must approve of the changes. The EPA requires certain information to be included on the label. If you don't follow the mandatory instructions on the label and have a pesticide accident, you will be held legally liable for damages.

A lot of research, time, and money is spent in making a new, effective product and the label that is placed on the product container. Not all of the compounds tested will make it to the market. Many controlled tests are conducted to determine the effectiveness and safety of a product.

The first set of tests we will discuss is the toxicological testing. These tests focus on the health effects of the pesticide. They look at how poisonous the pesticide is to humans, wildlife, and other organisms, whether or not there are long-lasting effects from the chemical, and whether or not it damages the skin.

Performance tests look at how well the product controls the pest on one or more hosts or sites. Crop varieties, soil types, application methods, and application rates are determined during this stage of testing. Results from testing must show that the pests are controlled and the chemical provides a measurable benefit.

Degradation testing determines how long it takes the product to break down to a harmless level in multiple conditions.

Mobility testing determines if the chemical will travel through soil into the groundwater or if it will travel from the soil to the plant.

Residue testing determines how much residue (or breakdown product) is left on or in a crop or animal at time of harvest or slaughter. It is during the residue testing on agricultural pesticides that the pre-harvest and preslaughter intervals are set by the EPA. These intervals are "the minimum number of days between the last application of a pesticide and the harvest of crops or the slaughter of live-stock" (NPAC Core Manual, page 33). "Adhering to these intervals prevents unacceptable residues on food, feed, or animal products."

The final series of tests we will discuss are tests to determine the effects the chemical has on wildlife and the natural environment. Manufacturers must report any potentially harmful effects on the environment to the EPA.

When should you, the user, read the label?

Make sure you are buying the right product, and that you know how to use the product appropriately.

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Make sure you are taking the appropriate precautions. You will want to know the first aid and medical treatments for the chemical. Familiarize yourself with any necessary information for using the product.

Make sure you know how to store the chemical properly. Do you need to take special precautions to prevent a fire?

Make sure you are properly disposing of the unused product or the empty container itself. You will also want to check with your state for additional restrictions and requirements that may not be on the label.