

THE NEED FOR TRAINING OF HERBICIDE USERS IN URBAN SITUATIONS

R N Henderson
 Protech Consulting Pty.Ltd., P O Box 851, Eltham Vic 3095

Summary There is a recognized need for training in the Agricultural Industry for all who use, handle and advise on farm chemicals. However, some of these chemicals are also used in urban situations by local and state government authorities. To meet the particular need of herbicide users in councils, a course has been developed on the Safe Use and Handling of Herbicides. Part of the success of this course has been attributed to its flexibility and relating the material to local situations.

INTRODUCTION

The community is becoming increasingly interested in the use of chemicals in the environment. Increasing attention is being paid to occupational health and safety issues by industry, government and unions. To meet these requirements, there is a need for managers of operators to provide specific training in the safe use of these products and operators themselves to become familiar with relevant information and to take the necessary precautions in the use of sprays (1).

Herbicides are a valuable tool used in weed management strategies. However they need to be used according to label directions to reduce possible hazards and maximize their effectiveness.

The skill of an operator spraying weeds has a large impact on the effectiveness of the operation. The aim should be to obtain maximum cover with minimum use of the spray. Incomplete coverage will usually require a respray; over-zealous application will waste spray, possibly involve non-target species and contribute to a build-up in the soil of persistent herbicides. This problem can be resolved by regular monitoring, close supervision, and operator training (1).

INDUSTRY TRAINING

The need for training to improve the levels of knowledge and skill of all who handle, use and advise on chemicals has been identified (2). The industry, through the Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals Association, has initiated and is still developing an accreditation system for all those who manufacture, sell, advise or recommend agricultural chemicals (3). AVCA's Accreditation programme has been modelled on the successful BASIS scheme in Britain (4). The Australian programme has two components to it. Accreditation of personnel by undertaking and passing the Farm Chemical Industry Course, and accreditation of premises by assessment against a list of criteria outlined in the AVCA "Standard for the Safe Transport, Handling and Storage of potentially Hazardous Farm Chemicals" (3).

In time, this accreditation system will be extended to include all users of farm chemicals. Farm chemicals are not only used in rural situations. A range of chemicals including herbicides, insecticides and fungicides are used by local and state government authorities in urban situations. The training needs of the workers applying these chemicals differ from those of farmers due to the different environment in which they are applying chemicals and the different background of these operators.

TRAINING FOR URBAN OPERATORS

Protech Consulting developed a course specifically designed for herbicide users working for Muirfield Agrochemicals Pty.Ltd. a company providing professional applications of herbicides and other pesticides for local and state government authorities, industry, nurseries and householders. The one-day course was then developed further and offered through Muirfield Technical Services to councils and other government bodies such as Board of Works, V-Line, Vic Roads and Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands.

The course has been run in five different locations in the Melbourne and metropolitan area. The basic programme includes sections on:

weed biology and control methods;
types and mode of action of herbicides;
labelling of herbicides;
protective clothing;
storage, spills and disposal; and
equipment and application.

The theory sessions include videos, discussion and demonstration of protective clothing. The application session is mainly practical demonstrations.

Before each course the councils represented are asked to provide details on products and equipment used by their staff to ensure these are covered. At the end of each course the participants assessment of the day's programme is sought via a questionnaire.

BENEFITS OF THE TRAINING

Managers and supervisors of Parks and Gardens Departments in local government recognize hazards and risks are associated with the use of chemicals in public areas. Therefore they are committed to providing training for their own staff involved in applying chemicals. The training provided is usually 'on the job', however more formal training sessions are becoming more important. Therefore the provision of the Muirfield course has been timely and well received.

Reaction from participants and supervisors who have sent staff along to the Safe Use and Handling of Herbicides training course has been positive. The benefits of the training course have been mainly noticed as improvements in worker attitudes as a result of greater understanding of what they are dealing with and what precautions they should be taking. It was felt that the participants were more likely to adopt the safe practices because a so called 'outside expert' had delivered the information. The other benefits have been reported to be more efficient use of herbicides, i.e. reduced wastage of chemicals and greater reliability in results. Some participants also indicated that they were likely to ask more questions on a course not given by their superiors.

CONCLUSION

Basic knowledge is required to gain safe and effective use of herbicides, not only in rural situations but also in urban situations. A one-day training course has been developed and run successfully to meet the needs of councils in the Melbourne metropolitan area. The programme needs to be flexible enough to take into account the herbicides and equipment used in each situation.

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