



# EarthWatch Rhode Island



## Topic: Safe Pesticide Use

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As the growing season has already begun, some homeowners may be facing pest and weed control issues in their gardens and on their lawns and considering using pesticides to solve the problems. By their nature, pesticides can be harmful because they are designed to kill or repel pests. Children and pets are especially vulnerable because of their size and activities (i.e. crawling on the ground, tasting unknown substances). According to data collected from the American Association of Poison Control Centers, in 2004 alone, an estimated 71,000 children were involved in common household pesticide-related poisonings<sup>1</sup> or exposures<sup>2</sup> in the United States. Common household pesticides can also find their way into the states waters where they can threaten aquatic life and affect the quality of our drinking water.

The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management encourages homeowners to use caution when handling pesticides or to hire licensed pesticide applicators who have been specially trained in product and application procedures.

Homeowners who choose to apply chemical pesticides themselves should follow these safety precautions:

1. Correctly identify the pest or weeds you want to eliminate and appropriate the pesticide. Not all pesticides are effective against all pests.
2. Choose the least toxic product available. Often baits and traps are safer options.
3. Read product labels carefully and use only the recommended amounts to do the job. More is not better.
4. Buy ready-to-use products instead of concentrates.  
Undiluted pesticides that require mixing are more hazardous than one that is already diluted.
5. Wear protective gear as directed.  
The use of appropriate gear such as gloves, long sleeves and pants will protect against the chemicals entering the blood stream through the skin.



Above are some basic safety materials to use when applying pesticides such as rubber boots and gloves, protective eye wear and soap and water.

6. Remove toys and related items from the area.
7. Keep adults, children, and pets away from treatment area during application and for a period after as directed.
8. Wash hands with soap and water and remove clothing after use.
9. Store pesticides in their original containers in a locked, dry area and keep out of reach of children and pets.
10. Dispose of pesticides according to manufacturer's specifications and never dispose on the ground or down a drain.



**Avoid over-use of pesticides, especially when using sprayers.**

Homeowners who hire pesticide applicators should make sure the applicator is licensed. Rhode Island state law requires applicators to attend specialized training which is conducted by the University of Rhode Island. Training and licensing procedures vary depending on the type of pesticides applications and the danger of the pesticides used. There are approximately 1300 licensed applicators in RI which include:

- private applicators who produce agricultural crops and use pesticides on their own farms or nurseries
- commercial applicators who apply pesticides to others' landscapes and gardens who use products readily available for domestic purchase
- commercial applicators who are certified to apply more risky, restricted pesticides

Once the pesticide applicator attends the appropriate training, DEM gives the exam and issues the license if the applicator passes the exam. Homeowners should ask to see the applicator's license or certification or call the DEM to make sure that he is licensed to do so.

DEM also enforces proper pesticide application through random and scheduled inspections. Department inspectors check licenses and have applicators demonstrate application procedures on-site. DEM can fine pesticide applicators who fail to demonstrate correct application procedures or have committed other pesticide use violations.

DEM routinely provides information to licensed pesticide applicators on new and safer pesticides and the effects that pesticide use has on the environment. Such information has had the effect of pesticide applicators converting to safer and low-level residual pesticides over the years.

#### *Alternatives to Pesticide*

Although pesticide may seem like a simple solution for eradicating pest problems, they nonetheless pose numerous risks if the proper safety precautions are not followed exactly. There are various ways to control pest problems without using pesticides in gardens or farms, including:

- Planting resistant varieties or well adaptive plants
- Rotating crops
- Cleaning plant debris out of the garden as pests often seek protection in rotting crops
- Going through the garden daily and hand pick the bugs off of the leaves and put them in a soapy bucket of water to kill them (check for eggs under the leaves too)
- Diversifying crops
- Using mulch to retain moisture and repel and confuse pests

On Camera Interviews:

- Liz Lopes-Duguay, Sr. Environmental Scientist (Below, left, being interviewed by Channel 10 Reporter Lisa Purcell)
- Reggie Gaynor of RS&C Landscaping (Below, right)

