



## Laundering Pesticide Work Clothing

Wayne S. Johnson, State Horticulture Specialist, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, Peggy McKie, Agriculturist IV and Charles Moses, Environmental Scientist, Nevada Department of Agriculture

If you work in agricultural fields, landscapes, nurseries, greenhouses or anywhere pesticides are used, you should know that pesticides can enter your body in four ways: through your mouth, your lungs, your eyes, and your skin.

Even small amounts of some pesticides can make you sick if they get on or in your body. Most pesticide handlers who become ill from pesticide exposure have splashed or spilled pesticides onto their skin.

Pesticides break down at differing rates. Residues of some may persist for several weeks while others deteriorate in a few hours. Many absorb and bind to soil, plants, equipment and clothing. Wearing protective clothing can reduce exposure of your skin to pesticides. However, with continued exposure the clothing itself may absorb and accumulate pesticides and become a source of contamination. Wearing contaminated clothing exposes your skin to pesticide residues, sometimes to toxic levels. Do not take this lightly. *Pesticide exposure through skin is the most common way pesticide illness occurs.* This can be avoided with proper care of the garments. Laundering or disposal of contaminated clothing is recommended.

At the end of your work day, take off your work clothes, shower, and put on clean clothes. Until they can be washed, place used work clothing into a container used only for pesticide-contaminated clothing. Do not ride home with pesticides on your clothes--you can contaminate the vehicle. Even if you wear a coverall over regular work clothes, the work clothes can pick up small amounts of pesticides. Anyone who touches your clothes can also absorb the pesticide residue through

their hands. At home, be sure to keep the contaminated clothing out of the reach of children and pets. If possible, leave them at work and launder them there.

### Laundering Work Clothing

- Use disposable clothing whenever possible. This eliminates the need for washing contaminated clothes. Depending on the type of disposable clothing used, it should be replaced after every use or according to the clothing manufacturer's instructions.
- Start with clean clothes every day. Do not wear contaminated clothing. Launder protective clothing after each use. For best results, clothing should be washed as soon as possible after being worn. The longer the clothing is stored before washing, the harder it is to remove pesticide residue.
- The pesticide formulation greatly affects how well the product is removed from clothing. If clothing is heavily contaminated with concentrated pesticides, discard the clothing. High levels of pesticides may remain in clothing even after several washings. Read and follow the laundering instructions on the label of the pesticide. If there are any questions, call the manufacturer's hotline for answers before wearing the clothing a second time.
- Empty pesticide granules from cuffs and pockets. Do this outdoors immediately after the application, at the application site. Continuously emptying your cuffs and pockets onto the ground outside a shop, workroom, supply shed or clothes changing area contaminates the soil, concentrates many pesticides in one area and increases additional risks to humans and the

environment. Pesticide granules and residues left in clothing will dissolve in the wash water, but may not be completely removed from the clothing during the wash cycle.

- Always keep your pesticide work clothes separate from other clothing. Set aside a special container such as a plastic bag, a container with a tight fitting lid, or a hamper, to be used only for pesticide-contaminated work clothing. Residues can be transferred from pesticide contaminated clothing to other items in a closet or in the wash. Always store and handle them separately. This also eliminates the possibility that contaminated clothing might get washed with other clothes and be mistakenly worn. The person doing the laundry should be told which clothing has been worn in handling and applying pesticides. They should wear rubber gloves when handling pesticide-contaminated clothing so they do not absorb pesticide residues through their hands. If the pesticide was applied as a dust, have the person wear a dust mask to protect them from inhaling any residual dust.
- Pre-rinse contaminated clothing and thoroughly wring or spin the water out before running it through the regular wash cycle. Use the highest water temperature setting and the highest water level possible. This pre-rinse step is especially important for removing wettable powder formulations.
- For the wash cycle, use hot water (140 degrees F) and a full rinse cycle. Hot water is more effective at removing pesticides than warm water. Cold water is relatively ineffective at removing pesticides from clothing.

- Use heavy-duty detergents for laundering pesticide-contaminated work clothing. Heavy-duty liquid detergents are most effective at removing emulsifiable concentrates. Use the recommended amount of detergent, and wash only a few items at a time to allow full agitation and thorough cleaning. Wash garments contaminated by the same pesticide(s) together. Repeated washing is recommended if clothing is heavily soiled or contaminated with a very toxic pesticide. *Fabric softeners, bleach, and ammonia do not help to remove pesticides.*
- Whenever possible, dry the clothing in direct sunlight for at least 24 hours. Sunlight can break down many pesticide residues. If dried in a clothes dryer, pesticide residues may contaminate the inside of the dryer. If you must use a dryer, use the hottest setting possible to break down any residues. Do not hang waterproof pesticide protective clothing in the sun because it can be damaged by sunlight.



- After laundering pesticide-contaminated clothing, clean the washer by running it with no clothing in it for a full cycle, using hot water and detergent. This removes residues that have collected in the machine.
- Store your pesticide work clothes separately from other clothing. Do not use pesticide work clothing for any other use.

### PRECAUTIONARY STATEMENT

All pesticides have both benefits and risks. Pay close attention to the directions for use and the precautionary statements. The information on pesticide labels contains both instructions and limitations. Pesticide labels are legal documents. It is a violation of both federal and state laws to use a pesticide in a manner inconsistent with its labeling. The pesticide applicator is legally responsible for the proper use of a pesticide. Always read and follow the label.