

Good Neighbour Initiative

Spray Operator Guide

About this guide

This guide includes some possible questions you may be asked by either residents, neighbours, walkers or other bystanders. The guide provides general information about sprayer testing and training etc., but you will obviously need to give the relevant and appropriate answers to your own specific spraying operation which may not be included here.

Why do farmers use pesticides?

Pesticides are used to control weeds, pests and diseases which might otherwise reduce the crop's yield, quality and value. Farmers use a range of different approaches to minimise the use of pesticides, such as rotating crops around the farm, using pest or disease resistant varieties and using selective pesticides to control the pest.



Do you have a duty to share your farm spray records with members of the public?

By law farmers have to keep accurate records of all spray applications. These records are inspected every year by the independent farm assurance scheme inspectors and are open for inspection by the Health and Safety Executive. Although not a legal requirement, discussion with interested members of the public about what has been sprayed is always the best option.

Are your spray operators trained?

Agricultural spray operators have to undergo specialist training appropriate for the machine they operate or have had practical experience of spraying. In addition over 21,000 spray operators are members of a continuing professional development scheme (NRoSO) and attend training events on an annual basis. Spray operators are encouraged to be members of NRoSO (www.nroso.org.uk)

Can you be sure your spray equipment is safe to use?

The National Spray Testing Scheme (NSTS)* operates an annual independent testing scheme for spray equipment which in 2006/07 tested 12,500 machines which spray 89% of the UK sprayed area. Farmers are encouraged to have their sprayer tested annually. Pesticides are expensive and accurate spray application is vital for them to perform at their optimum. *(www.nsts.org.uk)



Can you use any pesticide on your farm?

Pesticides are regulated and can only be sold or applied in the UK if the Government's Pesticides Safety Directorate has first approved their use on the crop concerned and second, identified particular ways that each pesticide can be used (such as having a statutory buffer zone). The aim of these checks is to ensure there are no unacceptable risks to operators, consumers or the environment. In addition there is a Code of Practice for using plant protection products which explains how to apply pesticides to meet the legal conditions which cover their use.

Who advises you on which pesticides to use? Is he or she qualified?

Pesticides are very expensive so they are only used when necessary. Qualified professional advisors, called agronomists, are used to identify which weeds, pests and diseases we need to control and when. In order to advise on which pesticide(s) to use each adviser needs to hold a certificate of competence from BASIS (www.basis-reg.com) which is the professional body for agronomists. This involves undergoing training and reaching an acceptable standard in an examination. Most agronomists also undergo Continual Professional Development each year to be included on a Professional Register.



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Do you have a duty to provide notification prior to any spraying application?

Prior notification for pesticide applications is currently not a legal requirement unless spraying sulphuric acid on potatoes. However warning residents prior to any spraying applications can enable them to take any precautions that they feel necessary to try and reduce personal exposure and contamination of their property (e.g. bringing washing and pets indoors, closing windows etc.). Discussion and agreement with local residents regarding methods of notification is always the best option. e.g. a phone call, letter, or even an email or text.

If you would like to know more about the regulatory system regarding the approval, supply and use of pesticides then visit www.pesticides.gov.uk

How can spray operators keep pesticides from drifting into gardens?

There are various ways a spray operator can try to reduce spray drift:

- carefully monitor weather conditions especially wind to reduce drift
- have low drift nozzles fitted to the sprayer
- have a buffer zone alongside houses which is unsprayed

Remember that spray drift is not the only issue to consider, as there are also other potential exposure factors that could affect residents (e.g. volatilisation/ vapour lift off etc.).

In some circumstances farmers may change their cropping such as putting set-a-side and fallow alongside houses, or changing the rotation.

In Field Reminders:

- Are there properties neighbouring the field that could be affected by spraying?
- Do you know of residents or neighbours who are concerned about crop spraying? Have they been notified?
- Do the product/products being used have characteristics that may cause irritation or concern? (e.g. toxic, classified as eye, skin, or respiratory irritant etc.)
- What warnings do the product labels or safety data sheets give for when the pesticides are being applied? (e.g. do not breathe spray, fumes, vapours etc.)
- Is the field crossed by rights of way?
- Consider wind direction and local wind patterns. Could these cause pesticide spray to drift towards sensitive locations?

Important Note

Laws and regulations governing pesticide use may be subject to change. Therefore always check whether any new laws have been introduced which may have subsequently changed the legal requirements referred to in this guide.

