

Colorado Department of Agriculture The Importance of Preventing Drift when Making Pesticide Applications

Although preventing pesticide drift is the responsibility of the applicator, we understand that eliminating any off-site deposition of pesticides while getting all the necessary pesticide applications out when they need to go out is challenging. The wind often picks up too soon after the morning temperature inversion lifts!

Real or perceived drift is a major source of agricultural complaint investigations. Of the 43 agriculture-related complaints CDA investigated from 2004 through 2006, over 20% involved allegations of drift.

Some of the risks of drift to an applicator are direct and obvious: The applicator could be the subject of a complaint, and if violations are found, could have to pay a civil penalty. They also may be exposed to lawsuits and increased insurance premiums. And of course, most applicators are concerned about not harming the environment, pets, livestock and people independent of any economic consequences!

There are other, broader risks from actual or perceived off-target effects from pesticides. The perception of risks from pesticide use continues to be of concern to the general public. We can expect this to increase as urban development continues to encroach into Colorado's agricultural areas. Such public concern can result in pressure to further restrict pesticide use and otherwise increase regulation.

In Colorado, we look for violations of specific label provisions when we investigate drift complaints. In addition, drift onto someone else's person, property or crop would be considered unsafe and therefore a violation even without specific label prohibitions against drift. Some other states have passed specific rules defining what constitutes a drift violation, regardless of specific label provisions for specific products.

We know that the majority of Colorado pesticide applicators are interested in preventing drift. We plan to continue to work together with the applicator community and CSU extension to continue to improve good stewardship practices in this area.