

Mosquito Control: Pour out pesticides carefully

By **JEFFREY STIVERS**, special to the Daily News
April 30, 2005

Take a walk down the aisles of the garden section of your local Lowes or Home Depot store and you are sure to see a wide variety of pesticide products. They come in all shapes and sizes of containers; as liquids, powders, dusts, granules, pellets, baits and even donuts and are designed to control some pest around the home or garden.

There are insecticides to control bugs, herbicides for weeds, rodenticides for rats and mice, acaricides for ticks and mites, molluscicides for snails and slugs, and repellents for any number of pests.

What may come as something of a shock is that a stroll through your local supermarket will reveal almost an equal number of pesticides. Many common household cleaners and air fresheners are pesticides, too, based on their chemical composition. Check the label of your household cleaners. You might be surprised to find that you have been using a pesticide in your home for years without even knowing it.

All pesticide products sold in the US must be registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency before they can be sold. The registration process is long and costs the manufacturer in the neighborhood of \$17 million for each product. The end result of the process is a pesticide with a label that, if followed, will present no unreasonable harm to human or the environment. Homeowners, just like the Collier Mosquito Control District (CMCD), should make sure that they use only EPA registered products to minimize risks to people and the environment.

The CMCD is required to keep extensive records and receive periodic training on pesticide use and safety, something homeowners are not required to do. However, homeowners need to realize that the label on a pesticide is a legal document and they must follow label instructions to avoid the possibility of federal and state penalties. Aside from the legal issue, there are also a number of very practical reasons for following the label.

Using less than the recommended application rate generally leads to poor control of the target pest, requiring repeated applications. This unnecessarily increases the cost of control and puts more of the pesticide into the environment than is necessary. Not a good idea from either a financial or environmental standpoint.

More often the homeowner takes the attitude that If the label says apply 1 cup, then 3 cups must be better. However, not only is applying more than the recommended label rate a federal crime, its just not very smart.

The maximum rate has been determined by extensive testing to be all that is needed to control

the pest in question. Applying more material is a waste of money. More material wont kill the pest any deader or any faster. What it will do is increase the cost of the application, the risk to the applicator and others, and the amount of material entering the environment, which in turn increases the risk of non-target impacts.

With a long list of potential negative results from the over-application of a pesticide, and no positive ones, why even consider over-applying?

The next time you head out to the garden with your favorite weed or insect killer, take a few minutes to read the label on the product you intend to use.

If the product you intend to use does not carry an EPA Registration number, do not use it. It has not been tested to ensure that it is safe and will actually control the pest you are targeting.

If the product does have an EPA Registration number, be sure to read and carefully follow all of the instructions on the label. The instructions are your legal guide on how to use the product to control your problem pest while protecting people, pets, the environment, and your bank account.

If you have questions about how to use a product, check the product label for a customer assistance phone number and give the manufacturer a call. Its representative should be able to answer your questions. If there is no customer assistance number on the product, call the CMCD or stop by the office with a copy of the label and we will try to help.



Jeffrey C. Stivers, Ph.D. is director of research for Collier Mosquito Control District. Contact him at JStivers@collier-mosquito.org or by phone at 436-1000. The district Web site is www.collier-mosquito.org.