

# PESTICIDES

## Introduction

Working with pesticides is dangerous. The chemicals chosen to kill pests are selected because their toxic properties make them efficient at poisoning unwanted plants, insects, rodents and so on. These same properties make them potentially harmful to humans as we share many of the same chemical pathways as other natural organisms. All chemicals can be poisonous and cause injury or death - there are no safe substances. Like most other chemicals, pesticides which can enter the body directly or indirectly have the potential to cause both acute and chronic injury to human health. They can harm worker and public health as well as wildlife and the general environment.

Although employers, pesticide industry sellers and advisors, and even government advisors may tell you the opposite, in practice, there will always be a degree of risk attached to the use or other exposure to pesticides.

The reality is that many agricultural workers are still forced to use, or are exposed to, pesticides as an everyday part of their job. Pesticides present their greatest danger when being used or there is close exposure to them. So in this section, we look at the hazards that can occur before, during, and after pesticide use, and what practical precautions should be taken. Always remember to look for alternatives to pesticide use to prevent risks.

## Aims

Section 5 consists of course materials that will help participants to:

- identify health, safety and environmental problems (HS&E) caused by pesticides
- involve members and develop their awareness about pesticides
- develop a trade union approach to pesticides
- use information and the law to track down information about pesticides and know how to use it effectively
- improve health and safety - by proposing plans for identifying the hazards of pesticides, preventing pesticide risks and proposing alternatives
- develop the skills needed to tackle pesticide hazards including collective bargaining agreements on HS&E and using the law

## About this sub-section

This sub-section will help us to:

- find out what our members think about pesticides
- identify pesticides that are used in our workplaces
- ensure that our work on pesticides is relevant to our workplaces

## Obtaining members' views

It is essential that we effectively represent the views of our members. Without their support we can become isolated and unable to tackle the hazards from pesticides. To win their support, members have to be informed and involved by worker HS&E representatives. We can do this by:

- listening to what they have to say about pesticide hazards
- convincing them of the dangers where the risks may not be obvious
- developing their awareness about pesticides and alternatives
- identifying the employer's obligations to prevent or control the hazards from pesticides
- working collectively with them to ensure that employers implement high standards

## **ACTIVITY**

### **Members' survey**

#### **AIMS**

To help us to:

- talk to our members
- obtain members' views and other information about pesticides
- ensure that the course is relevant to our situations

#### **TASK**

1. Before you come on the course, have a short discussion with a cross-section of your members. Make a note of their answers to the following questions, and bring your notes along to the course.
  - What pesticides do they work with, or what pesticides are they exposed to?
  - Do they have any concerns about the way pesticides are used?
  - Do they think that pesticides cause them ill health? If so what are the symptoms?
  - Do they think that pesticides are necessary?
  - What training and information have they received about pesticides?
2. Try to obtain information that you think will be helpful on the course. For example:
  - labels and data sheets for pesticides that are being used at the workplace
  - any collective bargaining agreements relating to pesticide use
  - documents relating to pesticides that have been developed by your employer, for example, risk assessments, safe systems of working, prevention or control strategies and so on.
  - joint worker/union - management safety committee minutes where the use of pesticides have been discussed
  - records of ill health caused by pesticide exposure
  - any other useful information

We will discuss what you have found out on the first session of your course.