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### Tips for Helping Employees Succeed

You finally found the right people to help complete your workforce. You are showing them what needs to be done and where. But are you helping them to learn how to apply pesticides safely and effectively? Are you guiding them toward the information they need, and will it be presented in the best format for their learning styles?

We routinely see frazzled employees show up to General Standards training because they were just notified about the training that morning. Often, they were not provided with any training materials to study ahead of time. While PSEP training courses provide a focused review of the basics of pesticide safety, they are intended to reinforce the content within training manuals. Workbooks are provided at the training, but seasoned applicators know that having a workbook and manual to skim through ahead of time really helps. This is especially true of category trainings such as Turfgrass or Ornamentals where the information needed to fill in the blanks aren't single words as it is in General Standards. For some, the act of simply reading the material is the preferred study method. Study materials can be ordered at: <https://extension.illinois.edu/psep/study-materials>.



It will also make the clinic process smoother and less anxious for your employees if you tell them ahead of time what



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classes they are signed up for and what the expectations are. The simple act of taking a test (where often their job depends upon successfully passing that test) is nerve-racking. Many of the applicators we see have been out of school for many years and it could be that school wasn't easy for them. So, inform them ahead of time and provide them with the right study tools. Our factsheet can assist: [Tips for Certification Exam Preparation](#).

Maybe the thought of being in a room full of 300 others is enough to spur concern. Our self-paced online training courses may be just the right approach. Courses can be taken when you are available at your speed. Yes, you can adjust the speed of the videos even! Content can be reviewed multiple times to reinforce learning. Access is available for 30 days. Knowledge check questions are placed between sections. Courses can be viewed from the comfort of your home or office. While this method will save time and gas money, it may not be the best method of learning for your particular employee. Have those conversations. Some have expressed to us that the in-person training clinics really are their preference because they need to see the trainer and be forced to sit and learn the material in a few hours. Some really appreciate being able to ask the trainers questions directly. Again, talk with your employees about this. Ask them how they would best be able to learn the material. It is in everyone's best interest for them to learn how to apply safely. In-person training clinics will resume in the fall, but online trainings are available at <https://extension.illinois.edu/psep/training-and-testing>.

Sometimes an employee will struggle to pass a test. Be sure and work with them to find out what manual chapter sections they are weak on. The IDA exam score printout will show the results for each section. You can assist by looking through their workbook and quizzing them. Coworkers can also assist in these efforts. You may find that they just simply need a little more work in certain areas, or you may find that there is something larger

going on. I've seen people miss some basic topic questions that I thought were drilled into their heads. It could be that there are reading or anxiety issues that are complicating matters. A little one on one time might bring some of these matters to light. In certain medical cases, extra time could be allotted by IDA, but this would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis. The Department of Agriculture is committed to complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act. To request an accommodation for a licensing exam, please contact the Illinois Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Environmental Programs, Certification/Licensing/Registration Section at (217) 785-2427, (TTY) 866-287-2999 or [AGR.PESTICIDE@Illinois.gov](mailto:AGR.PESTICIDE@Illinois.gov), and indicate the intended exam to be taken and the accommodation requested. The Department may request additional information but will respond to the initial request within 5 business days.

We are often asked if there is a practice test somewhere. Unfortunately, there is not, however, the Knowledge Check questions located in the online training can act as such. To be able to access them again, simply click through the training quickly by clicking on "Next". Alternatively, you could copy the questions down in your notes. The General Standards workbook contains sample questions in the back to give users an idea of the style to expect. Flashcards that have been created by other test takers are available online on platforms such as Quizlet. Currently, none of these materials have been created or approved by the University of Illinois Pesticide Safety Education Program or IDA. So please keep in mind that questions could have incorrect answers or could focus on extra material. While these services are free, ads come along with the flashcards.

Language barriers may exist with some of your employees. While training is currently available in English only, the General Standards test is now available in Spanish for in-person testing locations. Please know that the included label is in English only.

It's important to consider that one should take the test in the language he or she is most comfortable with. If someone has been studying the material in English, don't be surprised if they opt to take the exam in English too.

In the end, it all comes down to good communication between you and your employees. It could be that they don't know yet which learning method would work best for them and they'll need to try a few things. They'll appreciate you taking the time to ask them and work with them to help ensure their success.

*Michelle Wiesbrook*

## **EPA Releases Draft Herbicide Strategy, Public Comment Period Open**

**Strategy aims to increase efficiencies while supporting farmers, herbicide users with continued use of important pesticide tools.**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released the draft Herbicide Strategy for public comment, a major milestone in the Agency's work to protect federally endangered and threatened (listed) species from conventional agricultural herbicides. The Strategy describes proposed early mitigations for more than 900 listed species and designated critical habitats to reduce potential impacts from the agricultural use of these herbicides while helping to ensure the continued availability of these important pesticide tools.

"Ensuring safe use of herbicides is an important part of EPA's mission to protect the environment," said Deputy Assistant Administrator for Pesticide Programs for the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention Jake Li. "This strategy reflects one

of our biggest steps to support farmers and other herbicide users with tools for managing weeds, while accelerating EPA's ability to protect many endangered species that live near agricultural areas."

The Strategy is part of EPA's ongoing efforts to develop a multichemical, multispecies approach toward meeting its obligations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). EPA's traditional chemical-by-chemical, species-by-species approach to meeting these obligations is slow and costly. As a result, EPA has completed its ESA obligations for less than 5% of its actions, creating legal vulnerabilities for the Agency, increased litigation, and uncertainty for farmers and other pesticide users about their continued ability to use many pesticides. The Strategy — which is primarily designed to provide early mitigations that minimize impacts to over 900 listed species — is one of EPA's most significant proposals to help overcome these challenges.

EPA focused the Strategy on agricultural crop uses in the lower 48 states because hundreds of millions of pounds of herbicides (and plant growth regulators) are applied each year, which is substantially more than for non-agricultural uses of herbicides and for other pesticide classes (e.g., insecticides, fungicides). Additionally, hundreds of listed species in the lower 48 states live in habitats adjacent to agricultural areas. The proposed mitigations in the Strategy would address the most common ways that conventional agricultural herbicides might impact these listed species. More specifically, EPA developed potential mitigation options for conventional agricultural herbicides to reduce pesticide transport via spray drift and runoff/erosion that could result in exposure to listed plants and listed animals that depend on plants.

EPA expects that the Strategy will increase the efficiency of future ESA consultations on herbicides with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), which has authority over most listed species that could benefit from the

proposed mitigations. Under the Strategy, EPA proposes to identify and begin mitigating for potential impacts even before EPA completes ESA consultations. These early mitigations should expedite EPA's ability to fully comply with the ESA by reducing impacts to listed species before EPA conducts most of its ESA analysis. Adopting mitigations earlier will also allow EPA and FWS to use their resources more efficiently in ESA consultations.

The Strategy's proposed mitigations to reduce spray drift, runoff, and erosion and thereby reduce the potential exposure reflect practices that can be readily implemented by growers and identified by pesticide applicators and that provide flexibility for growers to select the mitigations that work best for them. The Strategy also gives credit to landowners who are already implementing certain measures to reduce pesticide runoff. For example, existing vegetated ditches and water retention ponds will qualify for credits that reduce the need for additional mitigation. Similarly, the Strategy would require less mitigation on flat lands, which are less prone to runoff, and in many western states, which typically experience less rain to carry pesticides off fields. The Strategy also describes how the Agency could add other mitigation practices to the menu of mitigation options in the future, particularly to incorporate emerging technology or new information on the effectiveness of specific practices.

### **Draft Herbicide Framework Document**

The draft framework document titled, "Draft Herbicide Strategy Framework to Reduce Exposure of Federally Listed Endangered and Threatened Species and Designated Critical Habitats from the Use of Conventional Agricultural Herbicides" is 97 pages long and includes a discussion of both the proposed scope of the Herbicide Strategy and the proposed decision framework to determine the level of mitigation needed for a particular

conventional agricultural herbicide. The draft framework document also includes examples of how the proposed herbicide mitigation would apply to some of the herbicides for which EPA has conducted case studies as well as EPA's proposed implementation plan.

Some of the accompanying documents are quite lengthy. The "Herbicide Strategy Case Study Summary and Process" is 666 pages! Coincidence on the number? I'm not sure. I haven't made it through it all yet. The primary thing I gathered from perusing through the spreadsheet files was that managing these complexities must be a nightmare. The document, "Application of EPA's Draft Herbicide Strategy Framework Through Scenarios that Represent Crop Production Systems" is only 17 pages long and includes possible scenarios. Examples 1 and 2 would be particularly fitting for Illinois corn and soybean producers. These are shared to help producers better understand how these mitigation practices may be used.

In its ESA Workplan and ESA Workplan Update, EPA outlined this and other ESA initiatives to develop early mitigations that provide listed species with practical protections from pesticides. The Strategy complements those other initiatives, such as targeted mitigations for listed species particularly vulnerable to pesticides and Interim Ecological Mitigations that EPA has begun incorporating under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act. The draft framework describes how EPA would apply the mitigations in the Strategy compared to mitigations in the other initiatives.

### **What can you do? Submit comments! Learn more!**

The draft herbicide framework and accompanying documents are available in docket [EPA-HQ-OPP-2023-0365](https://www.regulations.gov/docket/EPA-HQ-OPP-2023-0365) for public comment for 60 days. **Comments are due September 22, 2023.** Agricultural pesticide users are encouraged to learn about EPA's



plan and to start thinking about how these mitigation measures could apply to herbicide use in their operation. While extensive recordkeeping is not currently required for the mitigation factors described in the strategy, it is highly recommended that users begin thinking about how to incorporate these new elements into their current record systems. If you are applying according to label directions, proper records can only assist your defense should you need it. To help guide you, watch for shared comments from professional organizations such as the Weed Science Society of America (WSSA). In April, a WSSA [press release](#) linked their comments to EPA and encouraged growers to act now to understand the impact of ESA's new compliance initiatives. One good suggestion they offered to growers is to learn how to use [EPA's Bulletins Live! Two](#) which is where important application instructions will be found.

EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs will present a webinar on this draft herbicide Strategy on August 10th at Noon Central Time. EPA plans to walk through the framework and take questions from grower groups and other stakeholders. [Register](#) today. Questions may be submitted in advance of the webinar by emailing [sm.opmp.pesticides@usda.gov](mailto:sm.opmp.pesticides@usda.gov).

To learn more about EPA's comprehensive ESA workplan Check out our article, "Change Coming to How EPA Protects Endangered Species from Pesticides – Feedback Needed" in the [November/December 2022 issue](#) of this newsletter. Proposed mitigation measures are discussed in more general terms in this comprehensive workplan. Please note that the comment period discussed there has ended.

Visit EPA's [website](#) to learn more about how EPA's pesticide program is protecting endangered species.

*Michelle Wiesbrook, adapted slightly from an EPA press release, "EPA Releases Draft Strategy to Better Protect Endangered Species from Herbicide Use" and related EPA documents.*

## Paraquat certification valid 3 years, are you due for training?



Just a quick reminder that Paraquat users are required to participate in product training every three years. EPA requires that Paraquat applicators take an EPA-approved training program every three years in order to mix, load, apply, or handle Paraquat. This training was first released in 2020 and records indicate that some users may be forgetting to retake the training. Users should check the date printed on their training certificate. Current certification is valid until 3 years after that date. If it is past that time frame, and if you plan to continue to use Paraquat, training is needed.

This course is available online in both English and Spanish at <https://npsec.us/paraquat>. At that site, there is also a course for in-person trainers.

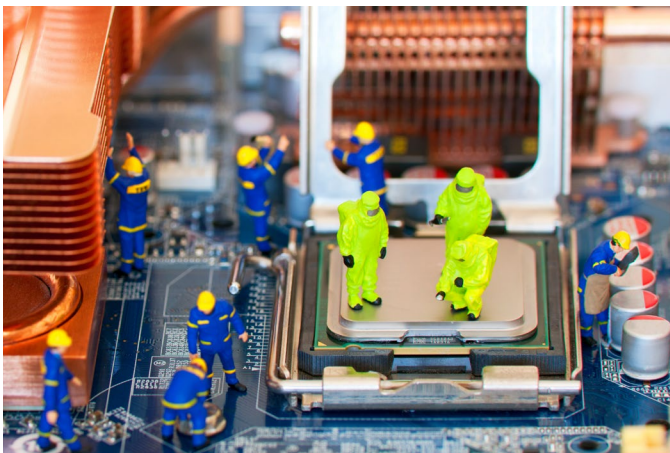
Paraquat herbicide is allowed for use only by certified applicators who have taken an approved course. Paraquat is applied annually to control invasive weeds and plants in more than 100 crops—including cotton, corn, and soybeans, and there are presently no direct alternatives to this product. It is highly toxic. In fact, one sip can kill and there is no antidote unfortunately.

In October 2020, EPA proposed new safety measures for Paraquat to reduce risks associated with Paraquat in order to better protect human health and the environment. These are outlined in the [November/December 2020](#) issue of the Illinois Pesticide Review. Proactive steps were taken to ensure Paraquat is used in a manner that is safe and consistent with the label directions. In August 2021, EPA released its registration review interim decision which finalized the new, stronger safety measures in place now.

For more information about Paraquat, see EPA's [website](#) for a list of frequently asked questions. Additionally, this [page](#) provides information on using Paraquat products safely, human health, ecological health, and EPA actions.

*Michelle Wiesbrook*

## Online Training and Testing Down for Seasonal Maintenance Beginning Aug. 31



The summer field season is underway and Illinois applicators and operators are doing what they do best! With the training and testing season nearing its end, now is the time to enroll anyone who still needs a 2023 license. **The**

**Pesticide Safety Education Program's online testing and training system will be closed for seasonal maintenance beginning at noon on August 31<sup>st</sup>. The system will reopen in early October for those seeking training and testing for a 2024 license.**

Here is a list of all mid to late-summer training and testing options:

### Online Training and Testing for a 2023 License

- Those who enroll in online training typically have 30-day access to training. To ensure that you get all 30 days, please be sure to enroll by July 31<sup>st</sup>. All individuals who enroll after July 31<sup>st</sup>, will have access to their training until noon on Aug. 31.
- Those who would like to test online to become licensed for the remainder of 2023 must complete and pass their online test(s) before noon on Aug. 31.
- To enroll in online training and/or testing, please visit: <https://extension.illinois.edu/psep/training-and-testing>
- For Online Training Enrollment instructions and Frequently Asked Questions, please visit: <https://extension.illinois.edu/psep/online-training-closer-look>
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### Online Training and Testing for a 2024 License

- Those who would like to take online training and testing for 2024, can do so by visiting our websites in early October when the online training system reopens.

### In-Person Testing

- In-person testing is available all year through Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDA). In-person tests can be scheduled by calling IDA's Springfield office at (217) 785-2427 or the Dekalb office at (815) 787-5476.

## Other Study Materials

- Pesticide Safety Manuals and workbooks for home study are available year-round on our website. To see all category manuals and workbooks available for purchase, please visit: <https://extension.illinois.edu/psep/study-materials>

*Sarah Hughson*

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