



COLORADO ENVIRONMENTAL PESTICIDE EDUCATION PROGRAM

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HANDLING PESTICIDE TAINTED CLOTHING

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This fact sheet covers ways to reduce pesticide exposure due to contaminated clothing.

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Handling Pesticide Tainted Clothing

What do you do when your work and gardening clothes are soiled with pesticides? Pesticides are important in many aspects of weeds, insect, and disease management. The application of chemicals can involve exposure if precautions are not taken. Even when you wear coveralls over regular work clothes, your clothes can pick up small amounts of pesticides.

One step towards safe chemical usage is the use of protective clothing (see Pesticide Fact Sheet [Making Your Protective Clothing Effective](#)). Proper maintenance of protective clothing is very important in minimizing exposure. Some simple, yet important steps can reduce trace residues to very small quantities (parts per million or billion) after laundering work clothes.

To Reduce Your Exposure:

- **Consider disposable clothing.** This can eliminate the need for washing. Read the pesticide label to check for any special instructions. The pesticide formulation has the greatest influence on how easily clothing will launder clean.
- **Start with new or very clean coveralls each day.** Do not wear contaminated clothing.
- **Do not ride home in the clothes soiled with pesticides.** Put your used work clothes in a container until they are washed. Launder after each use. Clothing should be washed as soon as possible after being worn. The longer clothing is stored before washing, the harder it is to remove pesticides.
- **When concentrated liquids are spilled on clothing, discard the clothing.** In university trials, high levels of an unidentified emulsifiable concentrate remained in clothing even after 10 washings!
- **Remove pesticide granules from cuffs and pockets.** If the granules are left in the clothing, they will dissolve in the wash and may not be completely removed from the clothing during the wash cycle.
- **Store/wash contaminated clothing separately from other clothing.** Residues can transfer from contaminated clothing to other items. Rubber gloves should be worn when handling contaminated clothing, to prevent pesticide absorption through hands.
- **Do not overload the washing machine.** Wash only a few items at a time. Use the highest water level on your machine.

- **Pre-rinse or pre-soak contaminated clothing.** Completely empty the water from the machine before washing. Pre-rinsing is especially useful for removing wettable powder formulations.
- **Use the longest wash cycle with hot water** and a full rinse cycle. Hot water is more effective at removing pesticides than any other temperature. Cold water is not effective. Hot is defined as 140 °F; warm is 120 °F; cold is below 86 °F.
- **Wash clothing 2 or 3 times before drying.** If stains or odors persist on clothing, discard items.
- **Line dry in direct sunlight.** Do not put heavily contaminated clothing in a dryer. Pesticide residues can build up in the dryer over time.
- **Clean out the washing machine when you are finished.** Run one complete cycle without any clothing in it. Use detergent and hot water.



More Tips

1. Wash the **outside** of your gloves and boots with soap and water
2. Take off your other protective clothing while your gloves are still on
3. Inspect for leaks or other damage
4. Place your pesticide-contaminated clothing in a plastic bag or container
5. Re-wash your gloves. Take them off and inspect them for leaks and tears. Then place them in the appropriate container

References and Resources

Deer, H., November 1995. *Laundering Pesticide Contaminated Clothing*. Pesticide No.10, Utah State University Cooperative Extension Service, Logan, UT.

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What to do When Clothes are Soiled with Pesticides. September 1996. Iowa State University, Family Pesticide Safety, Ames, IA.

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