

Pesticide Applicator Certification and Training¹

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What Is Pesticide Certification and Training?

Certification is a process that allows a person to qualify to use pesticides (e.g., herbicides, insecticides, rodenticides, fungicides, organics, etc.) in the course of his or her occupation. In Florida, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) administers the certification process.

Training provides instruction on proper pesticide use and handling to individuals who want to obtain or retain certification. In Florida, UF/IFAS Extension primarily conducts pesticide training, but other associations, industry, non-profit organizations, private companies, and federal and state government agencies also provide and assist with training.

The national pesticide applicator certification and training program (C&T) is part of a larger body of federal pesticide laws and regulations, including the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) regulation of restricted-use pesticides.

- FIFRA assigns the EPA authority to regulate the manufacture, sale, distribution, and use of pesticides. It also requires anyone purchasing, using, or supervising the use of restricted-use pesticides (RUPs) to be a certified applicator.

- EPA must classify the product or some uses of the product as "restricted use" if the product may cause unreasonable adverse effects even when used as directed on the product labeling.

Florida pesticide laws and rules typically encompass the federal statute, but have additional restrictions. More information is available at <http://www.flaes.org/>.

Goal and Coverage of C&T Programs

The goal of C&T programs is to protect people, property, the food supply, and the environment from both pests and pesticide exposure by ensuring the competence of pesticide applicators.

C&T involves working with professionals who apply pesticides for a variety of purposes, such as the following:

- Agricultural or forest production
- Nursery and greenhouse production
- Control of pests and weeds along highways and railroads
- Control of pests and weeds in and around water
- Weed and pest management in natural areas
- Pest control for public health issues (e.g., West Nile Virus)
- Pest and weed management on golf courses and in parks
- Treatment of seeds, wood, and poles

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- Treatment of homes, businesses, schools, restaurants, and hospitals

C&T programs cover the following areas to ensure people seeking certification are well trained:

- How to read and follow the pesticide label
- Proper and effective use and handling of pesticides
- Identification and management of pests such as insects, weeds, plant pathogens, and rodents
- Pesticide storage and disposal
- Health effects associated with pesticide exposure
- Risks of pesticides to human health, the food supply, and the environment
- Consequences of pesticide drift, volatility, runoff, and leaching
- Environmental protection (e.g., water supply, pollinators, endangered species)

Pesticides are important tools in integrated insect, weed, plant disease, and wildlife management. C&T efforts provide for the judicious, proper use of pesticides as integrated pest management tools.

Who Is Involved?

EPA established minimum standards of competency for pesticide applicators. The agency works with and provides funding to pesticide regulatory agencies in the 50 states, two territories, four tribes, and Washington, D.C., to ensure pesticide applicators are properly certified. EPA also provides funding to university Extension programs through the Pesticide Safety Education Program (PSEP) to support pesticide applicator training.

USDA provides program support and assists in regional and interstate cooperation, working with universities to support the Extension network.

The UF/IFAS Extension Pesticide Safety Education Program (PSEP) trains pesticide applicators to ensure their initial and ongoing competence. UF/IFAS Extension PSEP does this in the following ways:

- Develops educational materials for pesticide applicators (e.g., manuals, videos, web pages, presentations)
- Develops teaching resources for county UF/IFAS Extension educators
- Develops certification exams to ensure that applicators are competent to use pesticides properly and effectively

through the exam process, general education, training, and hands-on experience

- Conducts recertification training (e.g., web-based tutorials, classes, hands-on workshops, sprayer calibration clinics)
- Contributes to state, regional, and national pesticide stewardship dialogue
- Serves as speakers for other organizations

FDACS administers the pesticide applicator certification and recertification programs. It works with EPA to ensure the program meets the national standards but can implement stricter requirements. FDACS also supports the UF/IFAS Extension PSEP. FDACS enforces the Florida Pesticide Law, including requirements related to certification to use certain pesticides.

Pesticide applicators are the key stakeholders in the C&T program. Certified applicators are classified in the following ways:

- Private (agricultural production on own or employer's land)
- Public (government agency)
- Commercial (all others who are not private or public applicators)

In Florida, industry sponsors or participates in initial and/or continuing education programs for applicators, providing stewardship and technical expertise.

Collaboration in C&T

FDACS and the UF/IFAS Extension PSEP work closely to maintain the pesticide applicator certification program. FDACS oversees the exam and certification process, while UF/IFAS Extension PSEP administers exams in its county Extension offices. FDACS and UF/IFAS Extension PSEP often work together in developing exams, manuals, and certification and recertification training programs. UF/IFAS Extension PSEP educators ensure that the training they develop and deliver meets the needs of the FDACS' certification program. FDACS approves the providers and courses, and often participates in training sessions.

Federal and State Contacts

The following resources can provide information about certification requirements in Florida:

- FDACS: <http://www.flaes.org/>

- UF/IFAS Extension Pesticide Information Office: <http://pested.ifas.ufl.edu/>
- Certification and Training Assessment Group: <http://www.ctaginfo.org>
- American Association of Pesticide Safety Educators (AAPSE): <http://www.aapse.ext.vt.edu>
- Association of American Pesticide Control Officials (AAPCO): <http://www.aapco.org>
- Association of Structural Pest Control Regulatory Officials (ASPCRO): <http://www.aspcro.org/>
- U.S. EPA: <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides>
- USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture: <http://www.csrees.usda.gov>

Additional Information

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