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Pesticide Residue Management®

Andrea Durrheim

New Plant Nursery, PO Box 4183, George East, 6539

Email: andrea@newplant.co.za

During 2008, I was invited to attend a Pesticide Risk Reduction seminar in Sweden along with delegates from fifteen other countries. I would like to share some of the "food for thought" which was given to me during this initiative.

Pesticides and their residues result in risks to operators, workers, consumers, and the environment. Residues are found on plant material, in the air, water, and soil, and as growers in a green industry, it is very much in our power to limit these potential impacts.

Pesticide residues on plants can endanger the health of workers and consumers. In the case of ornamental crops (not intended for eating) withholding periods are often not considered important. Re-entry periods specified on pesticide labels are, however of paramount importance. Pesticide residues can accumulate in the human body, later resulting in diseases such as cancer which is difficult or impossible to trace back to chemical exposure. Concern for our workers and consumers should result in a strong awareness of re-entry periods as well as affect our pesticide choices. Toxicity, the persistence of residues, and the ability of the human body to metabolize these are of importance. United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) has developed a "resource tool" which is downloadable and free at: <<http://www.chem.unep.ch/Pesticides/PesticideResourceTool/default.htm>>.

Pesticide residues are found in the air owing to volatilization and drift. Drift can be contained by making use of correct nozzle choices for the chemical to be applied as well as by avoiding spraying in windy conditions. When in Sweden, our group tested drift by making use of a knapsack sprayer with different nozzles and water-sensitive paper. Even in an enclosed space where there was little or no air movement, fine droplets were able to travel for a surprisingly long distance. As soon as a fan was turned on to emulate a light breeze, many fine droplets were found on the water-sensitive paper placed 5 m away. Course droplets drift less, but don't cover as well (there are bigger spaces between droplets). Finer droplets cover better, but drift more. Efficacy is important: if the biocide doesn't work, a repeat application (with attendant risks and costs) becomes necessary. Droplet size is therefore a trade-off between efficacy (as much as possible) and drift (as little as possible).

One of the most worrying aspects of pesticide residues and waste is that much of it ends in water bodies owing to leaching into ground water and runoff. In time, this can build up to considerable levels aggravated by evaporation. Water is life. We need to be careful about the pollution of water bodies. We may think that our contribution to this is negligible, but many small contributions to pollution can result in a big problem.

Pesticide residues can also build up in soil, leaching into ground water. Biologically active soil is able to break down small quantities of pesticide, but concentrated spills are too much for soil-living organisms to deal with.

As an industry, we are responsible for the generation of various kinds of pesticide waste including pesticide rinse water from containers and equipment, spills during mixing (nearly impossible to avoid), and excess spray mixture which has to be