

Pesticide FAQs

Q. Why are pesticides regulated?

A. Pesticides are poisonous substances that can have an adverse effect on the environment or impair human health if handled improperly. If misused, they could kill untargeted plants and animals or leave excess residues on food crops or in drinking water. Misuse of pesticides could cause health problems to people who are exposed to them by inhalation or skin contact or by eating affected foods or drinking contaminated water.

Q. How are pesticides regulated? Can the local Board of Health take any enforcement action?

A. The Federal Government regulates pesticides through the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). This Act gives the US EPA the power to register pesticides and to regulate the use, storage, and disposal of containers and manufacturing wastes. The Act also allows states to have the primary enforcement responsibility.

Massachusetts regulates pesticides under the authority of the Massachusetts Pesticide Control Act (MPCA, Chapter 132B of Massachusetts General Law). This law places the power of pesticide regulation and enforcement with the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture Resources (MDAR).

Local Boards of Health have no authority to intervene in pesticide misuse cases and all reports must be directed to MDAR at 617-626-1782. Your local Health Agent is happy to assist you with data collection and documentation of the misuse.

Q. Are pesticide applicators licensed?

A. Yes, all commercial pesticide applicators are licensed by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and given a unique license number which they should carry on them while applying pesticides. If you are unsure if the applicator is licensed you may check the license number with the pesticide bureau, call 617-626-1784.

Q. My neighbor wants to treat his yard with pesticides and I have an organic garden and honey bees. Is there anything I can do to stop him?

A. No, homeowners are allowed to contract with companies for pest control. All companies are required to follow the MPCA and its regulations (333CMR) regarding the use of pesticides. Your best line of defense may be communication with both your neighbor and the pesticide company to outline your specific concerns.

Q. My neighbor is spraying pesticides – what do I need to know to protect myself?

A. Go inside immediately, close all windows and doors, and shut off any air conditioners or fans that may pull outside air into your home. If possible, move your pets and livestock into shelter.

Q. My neighbor is spraying his yard and some of the pesticide has landed on my property, my pet, and/or me. What do I do?

A. Wash immediately with a detergent and change and wash your clothing thoroughly. If you or your animal feels ill, contact your doctor or the veterinarian immediately. Report the incident to the MA Department of Agriculture at 617-626-1782 (Pesticide Enforcement Hotline)

Q. I want to report my neighbor for a misuse of pesticides – what do I do?

A. Call the MA Department of Agriculture at 617-626-1782, they may ask for the following information: location of the incident, date, time, weather and wind speed, name of pesticide applicator or pesticide applicator's company, pesticide involved (if known), method of application, equipment used, and the specific nature of the event. It is also important to notice if there are any other witnesses, if so, please document that as well.

Q. Is there any other way to contact MDAR if I believe I am witnessing a misuse?

A. The Chief Pesticide Inspector can be reached at Michael.McClean@State.MA.US and the Pesticide Inspector for Southeastern MA can be reached at Jesse.Diamond@State.MA.US.

Q. My neighbor's pesticide application is drifting onto my property – is this allowed?

A. No, pesticide must be applied in a manner such that it does not drift onto an abutting property. If this is observed, document the incident, and call the enforcement hotline at 617-626-1782. You may wish to approach the applicator and ask that he cease and desist from pesticide application until he can ensure that it does not drift onto your property.

Q. Are organic pesticides any safer than inorganic?

A. All pesticides must be evaluated because generalizations based on chemical origins do not hold true in all cases. Please research each individual chemical and its appropriate application prior to making a safety determination.

Q. I think my neighbor's pesticide use is harming my bees – what do I do?

A. Contact the Chief Apiary Inspector immediately so that the issue can be promptly investigated. Kim Skyrn can be reached at 413-548-1905 (office), 857-319-1020 (cell), or by email at Kim.Skyrm@State.MA.US.

Q. How can I control mosquitoes and ticks without the use of pesticides?

A. Remove pest habitats by cleaning up garbage, removing leaf piles, keeping grass mowed, removing standing water, and food scraps.

Q. How do I dispose of unwanted pesticides?

A. Take unused, unwanted, and waste pesticides, pesticide containers, and partially full aerosols to your local household hazardous waste collection day. Check your town's website or <http://www.capecodextension.org/hazardouswaste/> for more information.