

**Chapter 70.104 RCW**  
**PESTICIDES—HEALTH HAZARDS**

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**Reviser's note:** Powers and duties of the department of social and health services and the secretary of social and health services transferred to the department of health and the secretary of health. See RCW 43.70.060.

**RCW 70.104.010 Declaration.** The department of health has responsibility to protect and enhance the public health and welfare. As a consequence, it must be concerned with both natural and artificial environmental factors which may adversely affect the public health and welfare. Dangers to the public health and welfare related to the use of pesticides require specific legislative recognition of departmental authority and responsibility in this area. [1991 c 3 s 356; 1971 ex.s. c 41 s 1.]

**RCW 70.104.020 "Pesticide" defined.** For the purposes of this chapter pesticide means, but is not limited to:

(1) Any substance or mixture of substances intended to prevent, destroy, control, repel, or mitigate any insect, rodent, nematode, snail, slug, fungus, weed and any other form of plant or animal life or virus, except virus on or in a living human being or other animal, which is normally considered to be a pest or which the director of agriculture may declare to be a pest; or

(2) Any substance or mixture of substances intended to be used as a plant regulator, defoliant or desiccant; or

(3) Any spray adjuvant, such as a wetting agent, spreading agent, deposit builder, adhesive, emulsifying agent, deflocculating agent, water modifier, or similar agent with or without toxic properties of its own intended to be used with any other pesticide as an aid to the application or effect thereof, and sold in a package or container separate from that of the pesticide with which it is to be used; or

(4) Any fungicide, rodenticide, herbicide, insecticide, and nematocide. [2009 c 549 s 1026; 1971 ex.s. c 41 s 2.]

**RCW 70.104.030 Powers and duties of department of health.** (1) The department of health may investigate all suspected human cases of pesticide poisoning and such cases of suspected pesticide poisoning of

animals that may relate to human illness. The department shall establish time periods by rule to determine investigation response time. Time periods shall range from immediate to forty-eight hours to initiate an investigation, depending on the severity of the case or suspected case of pesticide poisoning.

In order to adequately investigate such cases, the department shall have the power to:

(a) Take all necessary samples and human or animal tissue specimens for diagnostic purposes: PROVIDED, That tissue, if taken from a living human, shall be taken from a living human only with the consent of a person legally qualified to give such consent;

(b) Secure any and all such information as may be necessary to adequately determine the nature and causes of any case of pesticide poisoning.

(2) The department shall immediately notify the department of agriculture, the department of labor and industries, and other appropriate agencies of the results of its investigation for such action as the other departments or agencies deem appropriate. The notification of such investigations and their results may include recommendations for further action by the appropriate department or agency. [2009 c 495 s 10; 1991 c 3 s 357; 1989 c 380 s 71; 1971 ex.s. c 41 s 3.]

**Effective date—2009 c 495:** See note following RCW 43.20.050.

**Effective date—1989 c 380 ss 69, 71-73:** "Sections 69 and 71 through 73 of this act shall take effect on January 1, 1990." [1989 c 380 s 90.]

**RCW 70.104.040 Pesticide emergencies—Authority of department of agriculture not infringed upon.** (1) In any case where an emergency relating to pesticides occurs that represents a hazard to the public due to toxicity of the material, the quantities involved or the environment in which the incident takes place, such emergencies including but not limited to fires, spillage, and accidental contamination, the person or agent of such person having actual or constructive control of the pesticides involved shall immediately notify the department of health by telephone or the fastest available method.

(2) Upon notification or discovery of any pesticide emergency the department of health shall:

(a) Make such orders and take such actions as are appropriate to assume control of the property and to dispose of hazardous substances, prevent further contamination, and restore any property involved to a nonhazardous condition. In the event of failure of any individual to obey and carry out orders pursuant to this section, the department shall have all power and authority to accomplish those things necessary to carry out such order. Any expenses incurred by the department as a result of intentional failure of any individual to obey its lawful orders shall be charged as a debt against such individual.

(3) In any case where the department of health has assumed control of property pursuant to this chapter, such property shall not be reoccupied or used until such time as written notification of its release for use is received from the secretary of the department or

his or her designee. Such action shall take into consideration the economic hardship, if any, caused by having the department assume control of property, and release shall be accomplished as expeditiously as possible. Nothing in this chapter shall prevent a farmer from continuing to process his or her crops and/or animals provided that the processing does not endanger the public health.

(4) The department shall recognize the pesticide industry's responsibility and active role in minimizing the effect of pesticide emergencies and shall provide for maximum utilization of these services.

(5) Nothing in this chapter shall be construed in any way to infringe upon or negate the authority and responsibility of the department of agriculture in its application and enforcement of the Washington Pesticide Control Act, chapter 15.58 RCW and the Washington Pesticide Application Act, chapter 17.21 RCW. The department of health shall work closely with the department of agriculture in the enforcement of this chapter and shall keep it appropriately advised. [1991 c 3 s 358; 1983 c 3 s 178; 1971 ex.s. c 41 s 4.]

**RCW 70.104.050 Investigation of human exposure to pesticides.**

The department of health shall investigate human exposure to pesticides according to the degree of risk that the exposure presents to the individual and the greater population as well as the level of funding appropriated in the operating budget, and in order to carry out such investigations shall have authority to secure and analyze appropriate specimens of human tissue and samples representing sources of possible exposure. [2009 c 495 s 11; 1991 c 3 s 359; 1971 ex.s. c 41 s 5.]

**Effective date—2009 c 495:** See note following RCW 43.20.050.

**RCW 70.104.055 Pesticide poisonings—Reports.** (1) Any attending physician or other health care provider recognized as primarily responsible for the diagnosis and treatment of a patient or, in the absence of a primary health care provider, the health care provider initiating diagnostic testing or therapy for a patient shall report a case or suspected case of pesticide poisoning to the department of health in the manner prescribed by, and within the reasonable time periods established by, rules of the state board of health. Time periods established by the board shall range from immediate reporting to reporting within seven days depending on the severity of the case or suspected case of pesticide poisoning. The reporting requirements shall be patterned after other board rules establishing requirements for reporting of diseases or conditions. Confidentiality requirements shall be the same as the confidentiality requirements established for other reportable diseases or conditions. The information to be reported may include information from relevant pesticide application records and shall include information required under board rules. Reports shall be made on forms provided to health care providers by the department of health. For purposes of any oral reporting, the department of health shall make available a toll-free telephone number.

(2) Within a reasonable time period as established by board rules, the department of health shall investigate the report of a case

or suspected case of pesticide poisoning to document the incident. The department shall report the results of the investigation to the health care provider submitting the original report.

(3) Cases or suspected cases of pesticide poisoning shall be reported by the department of health to the \*pesticide reporting and tracking review panel within the time periods established by state board of health rules.

(4) Upon request of the primary health care provider, pesticide applicators or employers shall provide a copy of records of pesticide applications which may have affected the health of the provider's patient. This information is to be used only for the purposes of providing health care services to the patient.

(5) Any failure of the primary health care provider to make the reports required under this section may be cause for the department of health to submit information about such nonreporting to the applicable disciplining authority for the provider under RCW 18.130.040.

(6) No cause of action shall arise as the result of: (a) The failure to report under this section; or (b) any report submitted to the department of health under this section.

(7) For the purposes of this section, a suspected case of pesticide poisoning is a case in which the diagnosis is thought more likely than not to be pesticide poisoning. [1992 c 173 s 4; 1991 c 3 s 360; 1989 c 380 s 72.]

**\*Reviser's note:** The "pesticide incident reporting and tracking review panel" was eliminated pursuant to 2010 1st sp.s. c 7 s 132.

**Effective dates—1992 c 173:** See note following RCW 17.21.100.

**Effective date—1989 c 380 ss 69, 71-73:** See note following RCW 70.104.030.

**RCW 70.104.057 Pesticide poisonings—Medical education program.**

The department of health, after seeking advice from the state board of health, local health officers, and state and local medical associations, shall develop a program of medical education to alert physicians and other health care providers to the symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and reporting of pesticide poisonings. [1991 c 3 s 361; 1989 c 380 s 73.]

**Effective date—1989 c 380 ss 69, 71-73:** See note following RCW 70.104.030.

**RCW 70.104.060 Technical assistance, consultations and services to physicians and agencies authorized.** In order effectively to prevent human illness due to pesticides and to carry out the requirements of this chapter, the department of health is authorized to provide technical assistance and consultation regarding health effects of pesticides to physicians and other agencies, and is authorized to operate an analytical chemical laboratory and may provide analytical and laboratory services to physicians and other agencies to determine pesticide levels in human and other tissues, and appropriate environmental samples. [1991 c 3 s 362; 1971 ex.s. c 41 s 6.]

**RCW 70.104.110 Pesticide application safety committee—Report to the legislature. (Expires July 1, 2035.)** (1) The pesticide application safety committee is established. Appointments to the committee must be made as soon as possible after the legislature convenes in regular session. The committee is composed of the following members:

(a) One member from each of the two largest caucuses of the house of representatives, appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives;

(b) One member from each of the two largest caucuses of the senate, appointed by the president of the senate;

(c) The director of the department of agriculture, or an assistant director designated by the director;

(d) The secretary of the department of health, or an assistant secretary designated by the secretary;

(e) The director of the department of labor and industries, or an assistant director designated by the director;

(f) The commissioner of public lands, or an assistant commissioner designated by the commissioner;

(g) The dean of the college of agricultural, human, and natural resource sciences at the Washington State University, or an assistant dean designated by the dean;

(h) The pesticide safety education coordinator at the Washington State University cooperative extension; and

(i) The director of the University of Washington Pacific Northwest agricultural safety and health center, or an assistant designated by the director.

(2) The committee shall be cochaired by the secretary of the department of health, or the assistant secretary designated by the secretary, and the director of the department of agriculture, or the assistant director designated by the director.

(3) Primary responsibility for administrative support for the committee, including developing reports, research, and other organizational support, shall be provided by the department of health and the department of agriculture. The committee must hold its first meeting by September 2019. The committee must meet at least three times each year. The meetings shall be at a time and place specified by the cochairs, or at the call of a majority of the committee. When determining the time and place of meetings, the cochairs must consider costs and conduct committee meetings in Olympia when this choice would reduce costs to the state.

(4) (a) An advisory work group is created to collect information and make recommendations to the full committee on topics requiring unique expertise and perspectives on issues within the jurisdiction of the committee.

(b) The advisory work group shall consist of a representative from the department of agriculture, two representatives of employee organizations that represent farmworkers, two farmworkers with expertise on pesticide application, a representative of community and migrant health centers, a toxicologist, a representative of growers who use air blast sprayers, a representative of growers who use aerial pesticide application, a representative of growers who use fumigation to apply pesticides, and a representative of aerial applicators. The secretary of health, in consultation with the director of the department of agriculture and the full committee, must appoint members of the advisory work group, and the department of health must staff

the advisory work group. The letter of appointment to the advisory work group members must be signed by both cochairs.

(c) The advisory work group must hold meetings only upon the committee's request.

(d) Members of the advisory work group shall be reimbursed for mileage expenses in accordance with RCW 43.03.060.

(e) The advisory work group must provide a report on their activities and recommendations to the full committee by November 9th of each year.

(5) The first priority of the committee is to explore how the departments of agriculture, labor and industries, and health, and the Washington poison center collect and track data. The committee must also consider the feasibility and requirements of developing a shared database, including how the department of health could use existing tools, such as the tracking network, to better display multiagency data regarding pesticides. The committee may also evaluate and recommend policy options that would take action to:

(a) Improve pesticide application safety with agricultural applications;

(b) Lead an effort to establish baseline data for the type and quantity of pesticide applications used in Washington to be able to compare the number of exposures with overall number of applications;

(c) Research ways to improve pesticide application communication among different members of the agricultural community, including educating the public in English and Spanish about acute and chronic health information about pesticides;

(d) Compile industry's best practices for use to improve pesticide application safety to limit pesticide exposure;

(e) Continue to investigate reasons why members of the agricultural workforce do not or may not report pesticide exposure;

(f) Explore new avenues for reporting with investigation without fear of retaliation;

(g) Work with stakeholders to consider trainings for how and when to report;

(h) Explore incentives for using new technology by funding a partial buy-out program for old spray technology;

(i) Consider developing an effective community health education plan;

(j) Consult with community partners to enhance educational initiatives that work with the agricultural workforce, their families, and surrounding communities to reduce the risk of pesticide exposure;

(k) Enhance efforts to work with pesticide manufacturers and the environmental protection agency to improve access to non-English pesticide labeling in the United States;

(l) Work with research partners to develop, or promote the use of translation apps for pesticide label safety information, or both;

(m) Evaluate prevention techniques to minimize exposure events;

(n) Develop more Spanish language and other language educational materials for distribution, including through social media and app-based learning for agricultural workforce communities;

(o) Explore development of an agricultural workforce education safety program to improve the understanding about leaving an area being sprayed; and

(p) Work with the industry and the agricultural workforce to improve protocols and best practices for use of personal safety equipment for applicators and reflective gear for the general workforce.

(6) The committee must provide a report to the appropriate committees of the legislature by May 1, 2020, and each year thereafter. An initial report on the progress of the committee must be provided in January 2020. The report may include recommendations the committee determines necessary, and must document the activities of the committee and report on the subjects listed in subsection (5) of this section. The department of health and the department of agriculture must provide staff support to the committee for the purpose of authoring the report and transmitting it to the legislature. Any member of the committee may provide a minority report as an appendix to the report submitted to the legislature under this section.

(7) This section expires July 1, 2035. [2025 c 84 s 1; 2019 c 327 s 2.]

**Effective date—2025 c 84:** "This act is necessary for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, or safety, or support of the state government and its existing public institutions, and takes effect July 1, 2025." [2025 c 84 s 4.]

**Findings—2025 c 84; 2019 c 327:** "(1) In 2018, the legislature passed Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 6529. The bill recognized that farmers, farmworkers, and the broader community share an interest in minimizing human exposure to pesticides. It also recognized that gains have been made in reducing human exposure to pesticides and that collaboration between state agencies and the farming community could further reduce agricultural workers exposure to pesticide drift.

(2) The legislation established a pesticide application safety work group that would make recommendations for improving pesticide application safety. Work group members included legislators from both chambers and caucuses, as well as representation from state agencies and the commission on Hispanic affairs. The work group sought public participation to learn more about pesticide application safety. Many stakeholders including but not limited to local farm hosts, the agricultural industry, and members of the agricultural workforce contributed valuable assistance and input.

(3) The work group reached two noteworthy recommendations regarding what can be done now to improve pesticide application safety. The recommendations are to:

(a) Expand training because the department of agriculture lacks sufficient resources to meet the training demand from pesticide applicators and handlers; and

(b) Establish a new pesticide application safety panel to provide an opportunity to evaluate and recommend policy options, and investigate exposure cases.

(4) The work group concluded that legislation is warranted to expand funding for a training program and set up a new pesticide application safety panel with clear objectives.

(5) This section expires July 1, 2035." [2025 c 84 s 2; 2019 c 327 s 1.]