



Pesticide Applicator Certification and Training

What is Certification and Training?

Certification is a process by which a person qualifies to use pesticides (herbicides, insecticides, rodenticides, fungicides, organics, etc.) in the course of their occupation. Certification is administered by a state, tribal, territorial, or federal agency.

Training provides instruction on proper pesticide use and handling to individuals who want to obtain or retain certification. Training is primarily conducted by University Extension as well as by associations, industry, non-profit organizations, private companies, and federal and state government agencies.

The national pesticide applicator certification and training program (C&T) is part of a larger body of federal pesticide laws and regulations.

- The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) assigns the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) 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.
- USEPA classifies a pesticide as restricted use if it poses unreasonable risks to the applicator, other people, or the environment and requires assurances that the applicator is certified by demonstrating competencies.

State pesticide laws typically encompass the federal statute, but may have additional restrictions. Check with local, state, tribal, or territorial agencies for additional restrictions.

Goal and Coverage of C&T Programs

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

C&T involves working with professional applicators who make applications of pesticides for a variety of purposes, such as for agricultural or forest production; in nurseries and greenhouses; along highways and railroad tracks; in and around water; for public health pest control (e.g., West Nile Virus); on golf courses and in parks; to treat seeds, wood, and poles; and to treat homes, businesses, schools, restaurants, and hospitals.

To ensure that people seeking certification are well prepared, C&T programs cover:

- 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; thus, benefiting everyone directly or indirectly.

Becoming Certified

A person must comply with the certification and credentialing requirements in each state, tribe, territory or federal jurisdiction in which he or she intends to apply pesticides.

Who is Involved?

US Environmental Protection Agency

USEPA established minimum standards of competency for pesticide applicators. EPA works with and provides funding to pesticide regulatory agencies in 50 states, 2 territories, 4 tribes, and the District of Columbia to ensure that pesticide applicators are properly certified to use pesticides. EPA also provides funding to University Extension through the Pesticide Safety Education Program (PSEP) to support pesticide applicator training.

US Department of Agriculture (USDA)

USDA provides program support and assists in regional and interstate cooperation. USDA works with universities to support the extension network.

University Extension PSEP

The University Extension PSEP trains pesticide applicators to ensure their initial and ongoing competence. PSEP educators:

- Develop educational materials (e.g., manuals, videos, Internet pages, presentations) for pesticide applicators
- Develop teaching resources for county Extension educators
- Conduct recertification training (e.g., lectures, classes, hands-on workshops, sprayer calibration clinics)
- Contribute to state, regional, and national pesticide stewardship dialogue
- Serve as speakers for other organizations

State Lead Pesticide Agencies

State lead agencies (SLA) administer the pesticide applicator certification and recertification programs. They work with EPA to ensure the program meets the national standards but can implement stricter requirements. SLAs ensure that applicators are competent to use pesticides properly and effectively through exams, general education, training, and hands-on experience. SLAs also enforce pesticide laws, including requirements related to certification to use certain pesticides. SLAs are most commonly located in the state department of agriculture or environmental protection.

Pesticide Applicators

Pesticide applicators are the key stakeholders in the C&T program. Certified applicators can be private (agricultural production on own or employer's land) or commercial (all others who are not private applicators).

Industry

In some states, industry sponsors or participates in initial and/or continuing education programs for applicators; providing stewardship and technical expertise. Some SLAs and PSEP educators work with industry to develop exam standards and training (e.g., learning objectives/manuals).

Collaboration in C&T

State lead agencies and University Extension PSEP work closely to maintain the pesticide applicator certification program. The SLA administers the exams and certification process. The SLA and PSEP often work together in developing exams, manuals, and certification and recertification training programs. PSEP educators ensure that training they develop and deliver meets the needs of the SLA's certification program. SLAs approve providers and courses, and often participate in training sessions.

Federal & State Contacts

Following are resources that provide information about certification requirements for a state or territory (AAPCO), tribes (EPA), or state specific training programs (University Extension PSEP Coordinator).

- Certification and Training Assessment Group - <https://ctagroup.us/>
- American Association of Pesticide Safety Educators (AAPSE) - <https://aapse.wildapricot.org/>
- Association of American Pesticide Control Officials (AAPCO) - <https://aapco.org/>
- Association of Structural Pest Control Regulatory Officials (ASPCRO) - <https://aspcro.org/>
- US Environmental Protection Agency - <https://www.epa.gov/pesticides>
- USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture - <https://nifa.usda.gov/>
- National Association of State Departments of Agriculture - <https://www.nasda.org/>