

EPA Announces New Rules To Protect Farmworkers From Pesticides (adapted)

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On April 6, 2015. California and Washington have adopted, through state regulation, many of the rules that the EPA now wants to put in place nationwide. The Environmental Protection Agency has released a final version of updated rules intended to keep farmworkers from being poisoned by pesticides.

The new rules require farms to make a host of changes. Employers will have to train workers on the risks of pesticides every year, rather than every five years. Workers will have to stay farther away from contaminated fields. Farmers will have to keep more records on exactly when and where they used specific pesticides. And no children under the age of 18 will be allowed to handle the chemicals.

There's very little solid data on exactly how many workers are exposed to hazardous levels of pesticides, though the EPA estimates that 10,000 to 20,000 workers may be poisoned by pesticides each year.

But the new rules do not go as far as some had hoped. They do not, for instance, require routine medical monitoring of workers who specialize in applying the most dangerous pesticides. Both California and Washington require such monitoring.....The EPA, however, decided that requiring such monitoring across the nation would cost too much.

The rules will not apply, however, to farm owners and their immediate families. This was intended to reduce the regulatory burden on small, family-operated farms.