



# Maine Farm Safety Program

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## *Laundering Pesticide-Contaminated Clothing*

**G**rowers who apply or work with pesticides should wear special protective clothing. Despite constant reminders, they often don't. Many wear ordinary work clothes. Work clothes that become contaminated with pesticides must be washed separately and properly.

Traditional work clothing readily absorbs pesticides and holds them close to the skin. This increases the risk of skin absorption of pesticides. One hundred percent cotton clothing launders best. Even though this type of clothing can be decontaminated, you should use some form of suitably designed protective clothing.

### **Before Laundering Clothing**

Read the pesticide label. Labels may give recommendations for laundering. Always wear rubber gloves when handling contaminated clothing. Never launder pesticide-contaminated clothing with the family laundry.

Change clothing after handling pesticides. Hang clothing outdoors if it is not laundered immediately. Launder

clothing daily when applying pesticides. All clothing worn while handling and applying pesticides should be considered contaminated and should be laundered before reuse. Research shows that it is much easier to remove pesticides daily than to remove accumulated contamination. Burn, bury or dispose of (in the same manner as the pesticide container) any clothing fully saturated with concentrated pesticides.

### **Laundering Pesticide-Contaminated Clothing**

- **Wear rubber gloves.**
- **Separate from family laundry.**
- **Pre-rinse or pre-soak the garments.**
- **Use the maximum water levels.**
- **Use full cycle in the hottest water.**
- **Use liquid detergent for liquid pesticides.**
- **Use dry detergent for dry pesticides.**
- **Line dry the clothing.**
- **Clean the machine with a cycle of detergent and water only.**

### **Pre-Rinsing or Pre-Soaking Clothing**

Always pre-rinse contaminated clothing. Presoak your clothes in a suitable container, agitate them in an automatic machine or spray/hose the garments outdoors. Be sure children and pets are not playing nearby. When using a tub or pail for pre-rinsing, dispose of the water preferably through the septic system. If possible, keep clothes contaminated with similar pesticides together so they can be pre-soaked together and then laundered together. One way to keep them in separate groups is to use plastic-lined boxes.

### **Laundering Pesticide-Contaminated Clothing**

Launder pesticide-contaminated clothing separately from other household laundry. Pesticide residues can transfer from contaminated clothes to other clothing during washing. Wash a few contaminated garments at a time, using lots of water. Do not overload the machine. Use hot water only. Cold water is not effective in removing pesticides in the wash cycle. The water level should be at the highest setting and wash for a full cycle with a double rinse. Use dry detergent to clean dry formulations of pesticides. Use liquid detergent to clean liquid or EC formulations of pesticides.

More detergent is needed when garments have been treated with a soil/water repellent finish such as Scotchguard or Zepel. Use 25 percent more detergent than recommended on the package, even if the water is hard. But do not use more than twice the recommended amount. The excess suds may restrict agitation and decrease chemical removal. The repellent finish

must be reapplied after each laundering to give protection to the clothing.

Take care when adding fabric softeners and bleach. Fabric softeners do not affect either pesticide absorption or residue removal. Bleach may be used, but not on clothing contaminated with ammonia fertilizer because ammonia reacts with bleach to form chlorine gas, which can be fatal.

Pesticides cannot be removed from some items. These items include leather boots, leather watchbands, the inner band on caps and some decorative items. Once leather has been contaminated, it cannot be decontaminated.

### **Drying and Storing Clothing**

Line dry laundered contaminated clothing. This will eliminate accumulation of residues in the dryer and take advantage of the sunlight to further break down any residues left in the fabric. Dryers cannot be decontaminated. Store pesticide handler clothing away from family clothing.

### **Cleaning the Washing Machine**

Clean the washing machine thoroughly after laundering contaminated clothing. Run the empty washer through a full wash cycle with the highest level of hot water and detergent before the washer is used to launder other clothing.

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