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Operation Cleansweep in Florida: Extension's Role in an Environmental-Friendly Program Opportunity

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Abstract: Operation Cleansweep is a free pesticide disposal program that has operated in Florida since 1995. The program is open to commercial facilities, including agricultural production establishments, golf course operators, and pest control companies. Since its inception, the program has had more than 1,700 participants and collected more than 1,000,000 pounds of unused pesticides. University of Florida Extension's role with the program has been to serve as a member of the steering committee and promote and market Operation Cleansweep through normal Extension channels.

Introduction

Federal law prohibits applicators of pesticides to improperly dispose of pesticides. During the mid-1970's, the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 1996) was amended and is the Federal law regulating pesticides and their use. Statements on pesticide labels remind handlers of pesticides that improper disposal is illegal, and because pesticide labels are considered legal documents under FIFRA, handlers are legally liable for obeying all label directions.

Years ago, Extension identified waste management and water quality as two of its National Initiatives (Vaughn, 1989; Richardson & Mustian, 1993). Specifically, efforts have been made by Extension to promote sound environmental stewardship practices with pesticide handling activities (Kirby, Chambers, & Cuperus, 1995). Those who store pesticides sometimes face the dilemma of proper disposal options for unwanted or unused pesticides. Extension educators routinely remind applicators to purchase only the amount needed for a task or time period. Leftover products occur for several reasons.

- The product was damaged due to unfavorable storage conditions (Figure 1).
- Excessive amounts of product were purchased.
- A facility containing pesticides was purchased from a previous owner.

- A pesticide lost its use registration due to federal and/or state law.

Figure 1.
Old, Unused Pesticides Damaged from Unfavorable Storage Conditions



This article discusses Operation Cleansweep, a successful program opportunity that was developed and implemented based upon the need for proper pesticide disposal and its participation and promotion by University of Florida Extension.

Methodology

The purpose of Operation Cleansweep is to offer a safe, convenient, and cost-effective (free) means for agricultural operations, golf courses, and pest control companies to properly dispose of canceled, suspended, and unusable pesticides. The Operation Cleansweep development effort in Florida was initiated during 1995, with a statewide collection of more than 70,000 pounds of lead arsenate, a widely used pesticide for citrus operations that was banned from use by the EPA (Florida Department of Environmental Protection, 2008). The following 3 years, the program was a pilot project to evaluate its logistics and acceptance by the pesticide applicator community.

Funding for the program during 1995 - 1998 was provided by private industry and the Florida Legislature. Since that time, funding has been primarily by the Florida legislature, with the exception of 2003 - 2004 with additional funds provided by the federal government (Table 1). All funding is appropriated to authorize the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to implement the program. Private industry hazardous waste collection firms bid for the contract to serve the program's needs.

Table 1.
Operation Cleansweep Funding

Year	Funding (\$)
1995 ¹	31,500
1996 - 1998 Pilots	73,500
2000 - 2001	300,000
2001 - 2002	300,000

2002 - 2003	200,000
2003 - 2004 ²	325,000
2004 - 2005	100,000
2005 - 2006	100,000
2006 - 2007	100,000
2007 - 2008	100,000
Total	1,598,500

¹Of the \$105,000 total funding during 1995 - 1998, the Florida Legislature provided \$30,000 and private industry \$75,000.

²Of the \$325,000 total funding during 2003 - 2004, the Florida Legislature provided \$100,000 and the Federal government \$225,000.

Extension's role in Operation Cleansweep has been twofold:

- To serve on the program steering committee in developing and reviewing guidelines. The steering committee is a cooperative effort among government, agricultural commodity associations, private industry, and Extension.
- To promote the program through traditional Extension channels (Figure 2), including Internet, newsletters, and mass media.

Figure 2.
Operation Cleansweep Promotional Flyer



The steering committee set the priority for the program to target agricultural operations, golf courses, and pest control companies rather than homeowners, pesticide manufacturers and distributors, institutions, or

state and local government. The steering committee believes this was the intent of the legislature when they funded the program. Previous experience has shown that government agencies and commercial wholesalers tend to have large quantities compared to commercial users, and funding would be depleted rapidly. Disposal programs are available for homeowners with unused pesticides and other household hazardous wastes (Earth911, n.d.).

A list of participants, quantities, and products is compiled in advance of scheduling a pickup or collection of pesticides. The list is compiled and managed by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). FDACS staff verify the quantity and products by an on-site visit prior to an actual pickup. When a list in a region reaches a quantity specified in the waste collector's contract, such as 2,000 pounds, a collection is scheduled by the collector. Collection events take place December through March (Figure 3).

Figure 3.
Operation Cleansweep Collection Event



Results and Discussion

The historical data speak for the success of Operation Cleansweep. Operation Cleansweep has collected and disposed of more than 1,000,000 pounds of cancelled, suspended and unusable pesticides from more than 1,700 participants (Table 2).

Table 2.
Operation Cleansweep Results Through June 2008

Year	Participants	Pounds
1995	Unknown	70,000
1996 - 1998 Pilots	244	25,000
2000 - 2001	374	235,644
2001 - 2002	357	224,000
2002 - 2003	145	126,235
2003 - 2004	207	250,984
2004 - 2005	62	78,887

2005 - 2006	104	91,359
2006 - 2007	138	68,994
2007 - 2008	144	82,895
Totals	1,775	1,183,998

Operation Cleansweep's popularity quickly grew during the pilot years, as it became known as an effective means of pesticide disposal. The program provides great benefit because it:

- Promotes environmental protection.
- Is an economical disposal alternative for commercial establishments when compared to having to contract for their own disposal.

The program has depleted its allotted funding each year, so a limitation is the number of actual participants. There would likely be more participants annually should funding be increased. This is evident from the number of participants during 2000 - 2004, when additional funding was available, compared to more recent years, when funding was reduced. Those who wish to participate but who sign up for the program following the year's depletion of allocated funding are placed on the collection list for the following year should funding be appropriated.

Implications

A positive perception from an Extension educator's viewpoint is that a real need was identified, and the program has had great success. Promoting, advertising, and cooperating with a historically successful program are traditional service-oriented activities provided by any Extension program.

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