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Providing Quality Continuing Educational Opportunities for Certified and Licensed Pesticide Applicators

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Abstract

Applicators of pesticides are required to meet certain certification and licensing standards in order to legally handle and supervise the use of pesticides. The initial process is to pass the certification exams. To keep certification and licensing valid, applicators are required to retake exams or accumulate continuing educational units (CEUs). Providing CEUs is a great educational opportunity for Extension professionals. Florida is flexible in the types of programs that are approved to meet recertification standards for applicators of pesticides to renew their licenses. Approved program flexibility allows Florida applicators to achieve recertification with minimal time away from work.

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Licensed Pesticide Applicators in Florida

Federal and Florida law require that applicators of pesticides classified as "restricted" be certified and licensed. During the mid-1970's, the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (USEPA, FIFRA, 2005) was amended to authorize each state to enact a certification/licensing program for applicators of restricted use pesticides. The regulating agency for this program in Florida is the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS, 2007). Restricted use pesticides are those that are classified as such by the EPA because they pose a significant risk to humans or to the environment.

For a person to become certified to purchase and handle restricted use pesticides, they must meet competency standards as demonstrated by passing (70%) mandated examinations. In Florida, aspiring applicators are required to pass the General Standards exam along with at least one category exam. The category exam is based upon the type of work that they are engaged. Many applicators hold certification/licensing in more than one category. Exams are administered through Cooperative Extension offices throughout the state by Extension agents. Currently in Florida, there are approximately 12,000 certified and licensed applicators of restricted use pesticides. Some uses of pesticides require certification and licensing regardless of restricted classification. License types and categories vary in Florida, but are summarized (Table 1).

Table 1.
Pesticide Applicator License Types and Categories in Florida

License Type	Available Categories
Private (Farmers)#	1
Public or Commercial#	19
Pest Control Operator*	4
Limited Pest Control*	3
Public Health Pest Control*	3

Special Identification Card Holders*	2
#License required for restricted use pesticides only.	
*License required for use of any pesticide.	

Keeping the Certification and License Valid in Florida

To maintain the validity of restricted use pesticide applicator certification and licensing, recertification is required. There are two options for meeting recertification requirements: retaking and passing the exams or accumulation of continuing education units (CEUs). The recertification system used by the majority of applicators in Florida is accumulation of CEUs. Depending upon license type and category, the time period required to meet recertification requirements ranges from 1 to 4 years. The number of CEUs that must be obtained also varies, but ranges from two to 16 per recertification cycle.

The system is based upon two fundamental principles: review of current knowledge and learning new technology. The justification for such a system is that applicators of restricted use pesticide must continuously demonstrate a competency for handling potentially hazardous materials. Because of emerging pest development, emerging application technologies, and new pesticide products, such a system allows for the applicator to be exposed to educational opportunities.

Certified and licensed pesticide applicators in Florida have educational program opportunities offered in varying venues for earning CEUs. Private industry, trade/commodity associations, governmental agencies, and Cooperative Extension of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) are the major providers of programs. Regardless of venue, each program must be approved for credit by FDACS. FDACS determines the number of CEUs that may be granted based upon the program sponsor submitting an agenda with speaker information prior to the event. FDACS then provides the program sponsor with attendance verification forms. Upon completion of a program, the sponsor provides each attendee the attendance form to submit to FDACS when their appropriate number of CEUs has been earned as they near the completion of their cycle.

Until recent years, programs consisted of traditional classroom/seminar venues. In Florida, several annual events have historically attracted large numbers of applicators. For example, the 2007 UF/IFAS Aquatic Weed Management Conference drew 482 attendees. Similar types of group format activities often approved for credit include field day/workshop events, often hosted by UF/IFAS facilities.

Although these types of classroom/seminar events are still very common and encouraged, many applicators are earning CEUs through opportunities made possible with more recent distance technology. Some trade journal publications will host an article submitted by a UF/IFAS Extension educator. An applicator who reads the article may contact the Extension educator for a set of questions, and upon returning the correct answers to the question set, the Extension agent will issue an attendance verification form.

Another available option is for an applicator to purchase a CD-ROM containing a tutorial that the applicator works through in order to correctly answer the accompanying set of questions. The most recent means for obtaining CEUs is through Web-based venues. Private industry hosts were the first in Florida to use this technology. Beginning in 2006, UF/IFAS launched its Web-based recertification program (Ferrell & Fishel, in press).

Implications

Because certification and licensing of pesticide applicators is mandated by law, opportunities will always exist to provide educational opportunities. Certified and licensed applicators in Florida are fortunate that FDACS is very flexible in approving the various venues of today's programs. Each state is somewhat unique in its requirements, but some states have very strict standards, such as approving traditional classroom-type venues only. Applicators in Florida are appreciative of this flexibility because such venues allow them to meet recertification, often without missing time from work. Future programs in Florida will likely continue to take advantage of the distance technology readily available for meeting this purpose.

References

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