

Scientists concerned about pesticide education funding

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Scientists with the Entomological Society of America (ESA), the Weed Science Society of America (WSSA), and the American Phytopathological Society (APS) recently expressed concern about the precarious state of the U.S. Pesticide Safety Education Program (PSEP). Funding for the program has plummeted in recent years and is now in danger of evaporating completely.

As the nation's primary pesticide applicator training and [education program](#), PSEP is responsible for ensuring the safety of applicators, other workers and the public, for protecting the environment and for providing [guidance](#) in the proper use and security of pesticides.

"In addition to certifying applicators and delivering education on the safe use of pesticides, the program today is tasked to provide guidance on a wide range of pesticide-related topics – from avoiding spray drift and minimizing development of pest resistance to protecting endangered species," says Lee Van Wychen, science policy director for WSSA.

Collectively, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) are responsible for ensuring that the nation's pesticide training needs are met. Since 1965, federal funds to support PSEP and its coordinators have been provided annually by EPA through USDA's Cooperative Extension System. In fiscal year 2000, for example, EPA provided \$1.9 million for PSEP, but in fiscal year 2011, EPA [funding](#) has been eliminated.

The only remaining source of federal funding for PSEP is \$500,000 mandated by the Pesticide Registration Improvement Renewal Act (PRIA II), which translates to only \$10,000 per state. However, this funding will end in [fiscal year](#) 2012 when the statutory authority of PRIA II expires. To compound the problem, most states have significantly reduced their funding for the personnel and basic services needed to support pesticide education through the Cooperative Extension System.

Statistics show close to 900,000 private and commercial applicators holding PSEP certification in 2010, including more than 100,000 new certifications and more than 225,000 applicators pursuing recertification. In addition, the program has educated more than a million other pesticide users.

"With nearly a 75 percent reduction in federal support for PSEP over the past decade, there is no question that states will not be able to deliver the same quality of PSEP training or to certify the same number of individuals," says Carol Ishimaru, APS president.

Earlier today, WSSA released a technical paper on PSEP that addresses its history, goals and funding. The paper also discusses proposed ideas for ensuring more stable financial resources for PSEP in the future. Examples include:

- Allocating additional dollars from federal and state pesticide product registration fees to cover education on the proper use of pesticides.
- Pursuing grants from pesticide companies, commodity groups, conservation groups and others with an interest in pesticide safety education.
- Changing policies, regulations and statutes to better support

funding. For example, most states direct fines for improper [use of pesticides](#) into their general funds. These dollars would be an especially appropriate source of support for pesticide safety education.

"There is no one solution to the increasingly precarious state of the Pesticide Safety Education Program," Van Wychen says. "A grassroots effort is needed by stakeholders at the state and national level to overcome policy and regulatory impediments and to ensure the program's sustainability and focus."

More information: www.entsoc.org/PDF/2011/WSSA-PSEP.pdf

Provided by Entomological Society of America

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