The Montana Private Applicator Program

by Cecil Tharp, Pesticide Education Specialist, Montana State University - Bozeman

The Montana State University Pesticide Safety Education Program coordinates the certification needs of private* applicators wishing to apply restricted use pesticides across the state.

PESTICIDES ARE AN IMPORTANT TOOL FOR MANY Montana farmers, ranchers and landowners. Many commonly used ‘general use’ pesticides can be purchased without a license and used on your own property. These pesticides do not generally cause unreasonable adverse effects on the environment and include such products as Ortho®, Sevin® and Roundup®. Other ‘restricted use’ pesticides are more strictly regulated and require you to have a license to purchase or apply them due to the potential adverse effects these products may cause the environment, non-target animals or the applicator. This would include such products as Tordon 22K®, Furadan 4F®, Warrior 1E® and many more. The Montana State University Pesticide Safety Education Program coordinates the certification needs of private* applicators wishing to apply restricted use pesticides across the state. This is a combined effort between the Montana Department of Agriculture and MSU Extension personnel.

There are many things a certified private applicator cannot do that are often misunderstood. Certified private pesticide applicators cannot apply pesticides commercially and can only apply restricted-use pesticides on land that they own, rent or lease. A certified applicator also cannot sell or give away pesticides. Finally, a certified applicator cannot give his/her permit to non-family members or non-employees to purchase restricted use pesticides.

Private applicators wanting to purchase or use restricted use pesticides should read this publication. For more information on non-private (commercial, governmental, non-commercial) certification contact the Montana Department of Agriculture, (406) 444-5400 for further details.

The process of obtaining private certification

To become certified as a private applicator for the first time, you must either attend an approved six-hour initial training program or pass the open book Initial Private Pesticide Applicator exam with at least a grade of 70 percent. This test is offered at all local county Extension offices and must be administered by an authorized representative of the MSU Pesticide Safety Education Program (generally the local county Extension agent).

If you qualify for certification, a completed ‘Farm Applicator Special Use Permit’ must be completed and sent with the appropriate fees to the Montana Department of Agriculture. The Montana Department of Agriculture will then mail you a farm applicator license within two to six weeks (Figure 2, page 3). The county Extension agent may issue a temporary permit to allow the purchase of restricted use pesticides as soon as possible, provided that it is the first time you have applied for a license. Temporary permits cannot be issued to applicators who have allowed their certification to expire (within the last 24 months).

*A farm (private) applicator is defined in the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) as an applicator that uses or supervises the use of any restricted use pesticide for the purpose of producing any agricultural commodity on property owned or rented by the applicator or his/her employer.
If you do not receive your license within six weeks, contact the MDA (406) 444-4900. After you receive your license contact the local county Extension office PAT (Private Applicator Trainer; Extension agent) coordinator to register on the local Pesticide Education Record Keeping System. You can then receive information on all Pesticide Education program opportunities, credit updates, and miscellaneous pesticide registration information. This will also assure that all training sessions you attend will be properly recorded for recertification.

**Private Applicator Fees**

Since 1993, according to the Montana Pesticide Act, the fee for private pesticide applicators is $50 and is distributed as:

- $15 (30 percent) to the Montana Department of Agriculture for administration.
- $15 (30 percent) to the Extension office of the county in which the private applicator resides. This money is used to support pesticide certification and training programs conducted in those counties.
- $5 (10 percent) to the Montana State University Pesticide Safety Education Office.
- $15 (30 percent) to the Montana Department of Agriculture Waste Pesticide and Pesticide Disposal Program.

The $50 fee is prorated over a five-year recertification cycle. For example, an initial applicator paying fees during the second year of the cycle would pay $40. The payment for the third year would be $30 and so forth. Refer to the Pesticide Certification Districts Map (Figure 1) to see what your prorated initial certification fee is.

**Pesticide Certification Districts/Accruing Recertification Credits**

All applicators must accrue six recertification credits by the end of their certification cycle. Recertification credits can be obtained by attending approved training sessions, taking an online quiz or taking a closed-book exam at the local PAT office. Montana is divided into five districts (Figure 1), with all the private applicator licenses in any given region expiring on December 31st of a given year.

If applicators fail to accrue six recertification credits by the end of this cycle, they will lose their current private applicator certification. Applicators who are certified in the fifth year of the certification cycle are automatically grandfathered into the next cycle and do not need to accumulate six recertification credits. Applicators who are initially certified after July 1st of the 3rd year of their certification cycle will be pro-rated three recertification credits. The only way to become certified within the first 12 months of a lapsed certification is a closed-book exam at the county MSU Extension office or attending a private applicator initial certification program.

An applicator may elect to take a closed-book exam (pass with a score of more than 70 percent) at any time during the fifth year of the certification cycle to qualify for the next cycle.

As a certified private pesticide applicator you are responsible for maintaining your license. You are also responsible for keeping track of the programs you attend. Do not procrastinate or you may be caught at the end of the

![FIGURE 1. Montana Pesticide Certification Cycle by Districts.](image)
cycle without any program credit opportunities in your local area. You have five years to attain six recertification credits. All program credit opportunities available in Montana are on the Montana Private Applicator Program web page (www.pesticides.montana.edu/pat/index.html) and select Training Opportunities. If you have any questions regarding other program opportunities contact the your MSU county Extension Office. For accessing recertification credits accumulated on your license navigate to https://mtplants.mt.gov/ and select 'Pesticide Programs' and 'Pesticide License Search'.

Contact the Montana Department of Agriculture if you find errors in your credit information at (406)444-5400. For other questions contact the MSU Pesticide Safety Education Program.

What can I expect if I qualify for recertification in the next certification cycle?
If you have qualified for recertification in the next cycle by accumulating six recertification credits or passing a closed-book exam, you should receive notice from the Montana Department of Agriculture in late November of the recertifying year. This renewal letter will indicate whether you qualify for recertification and ask for your payment of $50 for the next cycle. If you do not pay the $50 fee, you will not be recertified in the next cycle. Upon paying your fee, your license should arrive by February 1st of the recertifying year. Contact the Montana Department of Agriculture if you have paid your fee and still have not received your license.

Your License and Applicator ID Number
You will receive your license (Figure 2) from the Montana Department of Agriculture within six weeks of initial certification. You should be aware of your applicator ID number, your expiration date and your county of record.

Your county of record is usually the county where you reside within the state. This is important, as the local county you are registered in tracks your individual records and recertification credits. Your records are forwarded to your local county PAT coordinator. This is usually based on your address information given when you apply for the initial certification. If you move to a different address, be certain to call your local extension office and contact the PAT coordinator for updating the database.

Applicator ID Number. The applicator ID number is located in the lower left hand corner. Your applicator ID number is needed to verify attendance at any private applicator recertification credit opportunity event.

Expiration Date. The expiration date is the last day that your certification will be valid. This marks the last day in your certification cycle for the region in which you reside. You must have accumulated six recertification credits or have taken a closed-book exam (passed with a score of more than 70 percent) on or before the expiration date to requalify for certification in the next cycle. If you are certified in the final year of your certification cycle, you automatically qualify for recertification in the next cycle (Figure 2).

Online Credit Opportunities
At times, private applicators can find themselves short on recertification credits in the final days of their certification period. Online credits are available to all Montana private applicators. This opportunity is available on the MSU PSEP Web site at www.pesticides.montana.edu by selecting the Private Applicator Program link, then selecting 'Training Opportunities' then selecting 'Online Credits' on the right side bar.

Each applicator has the opportunity to gain up to two credits within one certification cycle through the online process. Many online tests are currently available and include topics on pesticide safety, calibration, record keeping, pesticide labels and personal protective equipment.

Online credit directions may vary so applicators must read and follow all directions by each online credit provider.

The MSU Pesticide Safety Education Program would like to stress that online opportunities should be viewed as a last resort to applicators. Priority should always be given to attending regular programs that focus on interaction and valuable feedback. This online credit opportunity should supplement the already existing credit opportunities within your county.
When purchasing restricted use products
The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has listed approximately 19,000 pesticide products at the federal level. These products are either registered as restricted use or general use products that may be purchased by anyone. Restricted use pesticide product labels will contain the statement, “RESTRICTED USE PESTICIDE”, on the top of the first page. A local vendor or dealer will ask for your private applicator certification when purchasing a restricted use pesticide product. If you do not have a current private applicator certification you will not be allowed to complete the purchase. Always keep your license with you when purchasing pesticide products and never purchase restricted use pesticide products for others.

Reference Materials
As a certified private applicator, it is your responsibility to use pesticides in a manner consistent with the product label, while following all state and federal laws regarding your pesticide applications, storage and disposal. Using reference materials to answer questions is an invaluable tool for Montana private applicators who find themselves in remote locations where quick answers are needed. All applicators should have a copy of the EPA Core Manual and Montana Addendum and be familiar with the MSU Pesticide Safety Education Program Web site. These manuals can be viewed online at www.pesticides.montana.edu by selecting ‘Reference Materials’ link on the left sidebar and then selecting ‘Pesticide Manuals’. These manuals can also be ordered from MSU Extension at (406)994-3273.

For More Information
Contact your local MSU Extension office or the MSU Pesticide Safety Education Program office at:
Department of Animal and Range Science
103 Animal Bioscience Building
P. O. Box 172900
Bozeman, MT 59717-2900
Phone: 406-994-5067
www.pesticides.montana.edu
Email: pesticides@montana.edu

REMEmber!
Keep your Farm Applicator License with you for all private applicator credit opportunities. To attain recertification credits you must attend the entire event, as well as mark your applicator ID number, county of record and signature on the attendance sheet for the event. Credits will not be awarded if applicators fail to mark this information.